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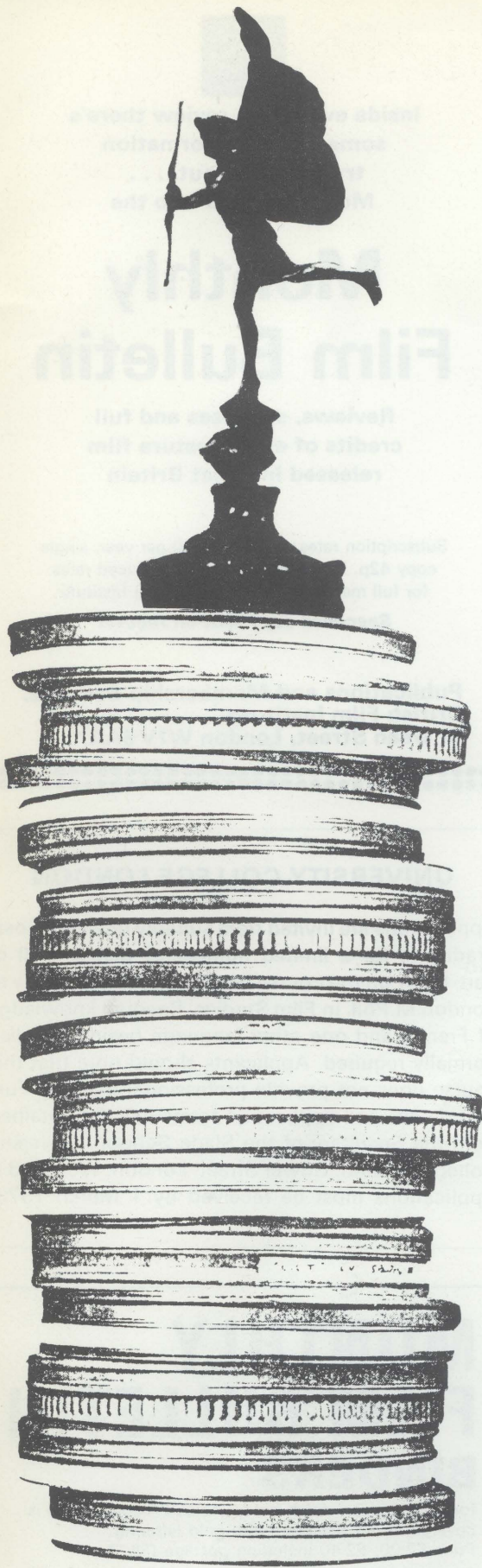
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Right:
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(Lars Lennart Forsberg)



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SIGHT AND SOUND

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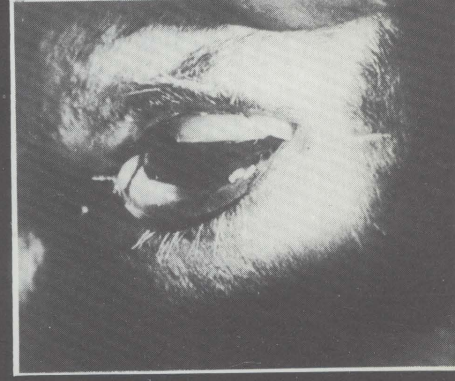
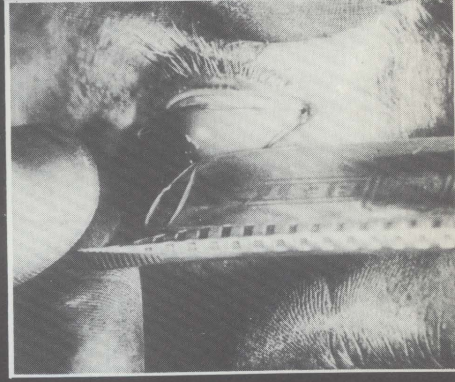
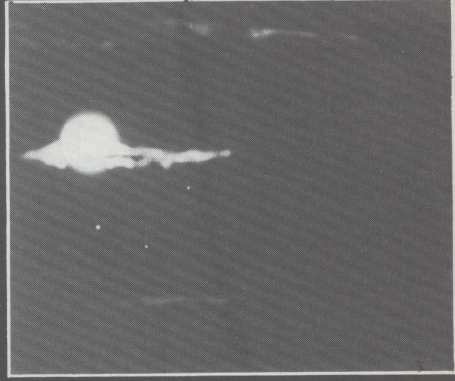
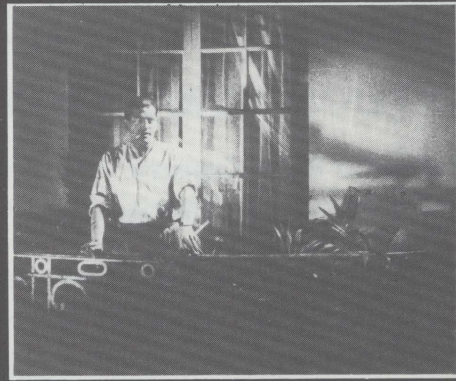
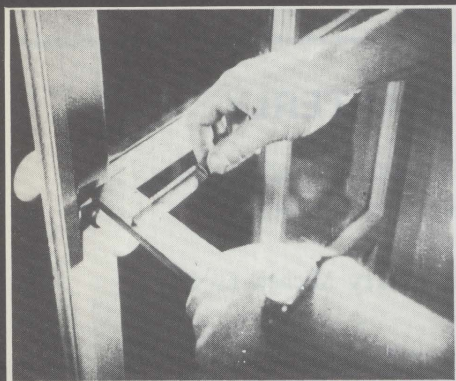
On the cover: David Gulpilil in Peter Weir's 'The Last Wave'

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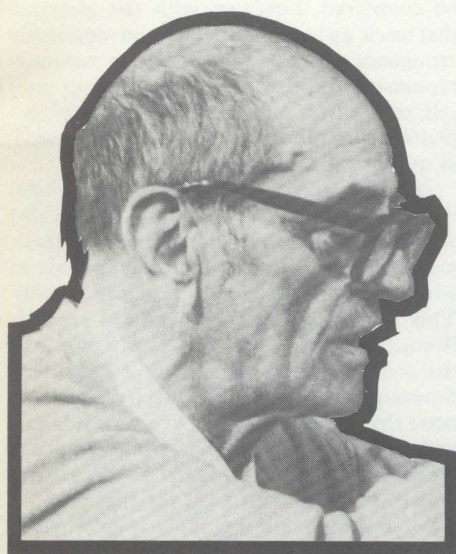
Il était une fois...

Once upon a time...



Huit ans après.

Eight years later.



Amazingly, it is fifty years this year since Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí produced 'a desperate passionate call to murder'—*Un Chien Andalou*. Neither Buñuel nor surrealism seems so old. In the intervening half century, Buñuel has made more than thirty films: *L'Âge d'Or* in 1930, *Land Without Bread* in 1932; then a gap of fifteen years, including the period when he was working for Warners, in charge of dubbing their films into Spanish, before production resumed in 1947 in Mexico with *Gran Casino*. The 50s were his most prolific period: fifteen films from *Los Olvidados* in 1950 to *La Fièvre Monte à El Pao* in 1959. But there have been ten films since *Viridiana* (1961) brought Buñuel back to Europe; and by way particularly of *Belle de Jour* (1967), *Tristana* (1970) and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972), the old surrealist has found himself in the ironic position of entertaining—no longer alarming—the bourgeoisie. The world has changed more than the artist: after fifty years of films, Buñuel's vision is singularly undimmed.

In the following essays, Ian Walker takes a new look at the first scene of Buñuel's first film; Don Willis writes about the tragi-comic hero of *Nazarin*; and David Overbey reviews *Cet Obscur Objet du Désir*, his new version of the story on which Sternberg based *The Devil Is a Woman*.

BUNUEL'S HALF CENTURY

ONCE UPON A TIME...

Ian Walker

A tango plays, a man in reflective mood, a razor, moonlight, a girl's eye. What effect can the first few seconds of *Un Chien Andalou* have in these days of Russell and Peckinpah? The effect cannot be that of 1929; even on a personal level, the physical jerk of the first time one saw it cannot be recreated. It is intended (and received) as a shock, one that can rarely have been equalled in a work of art. Such a shock effect is often denigrated as being both superficial and/or short-lived; it is condemned first, as being too easily achieved and too easily effective and, secondly, as being unfulfilling—once the initial powerful impact is gone, it leaves no meaningful resonance. The essay which follows is a denial, in this particular case, of this over-emphatic and too easy dismissal. They still have their effect—those few brief shots—but to say what that effect is, is somewhat more difficult.

Like many other viewers, I never had a totally 'innocent' viewing of the film. I had seen still photographs and knew from reputation what to expect. If any detail from *Un Chien Andalou* is ever mentioned, it is this image of the razor. We observe, coming to the film itself, not what is simply before us, but 'the famous scene where etc., etc. . . .' Even so, the 'larger than life' actuality of the cinema made what I saw more powerful than I had anticipated. Then, much later, I had a chance to see the film several times in a couple of days, and felt my reactions inevitably becoming anaesthetised and numbed. In viewing after viewing, the initial recoil was reversed; one mentally (maybe even physically) leant forward to see

'how it was done' (almost to count the giveaway hairs around the eye of the dead animal who was the girl's stand-in). One becomes proud of one's calmness in such a position—for the non-medical man, it is an ideal opportunity actually to see what is inside an eye. In any power that the scene retains, the actual razor cut becomes less crucial; it is the consummation (on with the rest of the film . . .). Increasingly, one feels the implicit tension of the build-up, the rhythmic movement toward that stroke. So, before talking more generally about the implications of the scene, it may be useful to consider some of the ways that that slice and those implications are supported and made especially pointed.

First, there is the title, 'Once Upon a Time' which, with its fairy-tale connotations, immediately projects us to a point where we cannot expect normality to maintain its usual grip. However, the savageness of what follows is to be in contrast to our usual expectation of simple fantasy following that opening. Even the later, more precise titles are thus removed from the 'sensible' arrangement that they initially suggest. When, for instance, is 'Eight Years Later' than 'Once Upon a Time'? And presumably 'Sixteen Years Earlier' is therefore eight years before this particular 'time' that we are first 'upon'. This is the first of various techniques that are used to undermine any conventions of narrative, temporality and spatiality.

The scene that follows consists of twelve brief shots. The first four establish the situation, intercutting between hands sharpening a razor on a strap to the head of the man who (one presumes) is doing the sharpening. There is no threat in the action beyond the fact that the object is a razor. Indeed, the calm practicality of the man's approach as he tests the blade on his thumb, and the fact that he is in shirt sleeves with his collar open, might lead us to assume that he is simply going to shave.

In the next five shots, although the action is developed, we are taken no nearer to the awaited denouement as the man steps out on to his balcony and, cigarette in mouth, contemplates the moon. If seen in isolation, the mood of this section might seem to be a

poeticism reminiscent of the moon in Jean Renoir's films. However, with knowledge of what follows, this quiet immersion in the beauties of the night sky becomes streaked with tension and disquiet. The physical demeanour of the man, we feel, is but a mask for the steeling of his will. Between the situation as we see it and as we feel it to be there has developed a gap. Atmosphere, character and lighting have all been carefully, if ambivalently, used to create a particular mood which is now to be violently negated.

We jump from the man to a girl's face, impassively staring back at us. There is no longer the atmospheric lunar light, no setting is suggested, the girl has no discernible personality. The preparations are effective and clinical—the eye held open with one hand, the razor moves in held with the other. We must presume that it is the same man, though our only evidence is his striped shirt; against that may be set the fact that he now wears a diagonally striped tie. This may seem trivial, a lax breakdown of continuity; in fact, it is the first example of the use of deliberately inconsistent details intended, like the titles, to break down any realistic progression of narrative. The particular break suggested here is temporal—that between the two shots, the one apparently immediately following the other, there is in fact time taken for the man to put on his tie. Perhaps the ritualistic nature of the action requires that he be correctly and 'respectably' dressed. Also it is a detail which visually reminds the viewer of the striped tie (though not the same one) later in the film, where the striping on both the tie and the ubiquitous box may be read symbolically as suggesting freedom (the diagonal movement) restricted (in regular stripes). So, once noticed, this apparently insignificant detail assumes several interlinking and suggestive meanings, though whether all (or any) were intended must be left open to question. Certainly, considering the taut expectation we have of the rest of the action, it is more than likely to be overlooked.

But that expectation is to be slightly delayed for, before the razor can move, we are taken back to the night sky. A cloud passes quickly across the moon, and only then in extreme close-up do we see the actual cutting of the eye. It is hard to say why the juxtaposition of razor and eye with cloud and moon is so effective. The parallel is firstly visual, and here it is important that the cloud is long and thin and that it exactly bisects the moon (an effect that must have been difficult to capture). Beyond that, one could construct some meaning in the relationship in that in both images, light is obscured—on the one hand, the source of light is veiled; on the other, the girl's perception of it is destroyed. Both could be considered as reflecting upon the main theme of the film—the relationship between the sexes. The razor cut has been psycho-analytically interpreted as a rape substitute; moonlight is a perennial setting for romantic love.

This, however, is more contrast than comparison, and the connotations of the two images—romance and sadism—are fundamentally opposed. Any metaphoric parallel we care to make is invented rather than naturally present in the juxtaposition;

the power comes from the dissociation of the moon and an eye, a cloud and a razor rather than their association. This was an effect often sought by the Surrealists, for whom a work should never be self-contained and exclusive, but rather open-ended and inclusive. To this end, they often used the principle of collage, whereby two or more objects brought together through their union create a new and otherwise unimaginable object. However, because of the temporal element which is inevitably involved in film and because both images are so strong in their different ways, they do not coalesce but rather remain determinedly independent. The moon/cloud image does not act as a metaphor for the eye/razor; rather, both images are seen side by side as equals. The effect thus works on three levels—the obvious surface comparison; the deeper lack of connection; and the deepest—what André Breton called 'the certain point in the mind at which life and death, real and imaginary, past and future, communicable and incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived in terms of contradiction.'

Another way of considering the juxtaposition was suggested by Jean Vigo in his review of the film (in 'Vers un Cinéma Social', 1930): 'Our cowardice, which leads us to accept so many of the horrors that we, as a species, commit, is dearly put to the test when we flinch from the screen image of a woman's eye sliced in half by a razor. Is it more dreadful than the spectacle of a cloud veiling a full moon?' Are we being challenged to make a moral and emotional judgment between the two images? Is there, somewhere inside us, a positive response toward the cutting of the eye and, by being 'civilised' and suppressing it, are we being dishonest?

There is a certain rightness in the fact that the man wielding the razor is Buñuel himself, rather than the 'hero' of the main part of the film who, although perhaps desiring such a consummation, would be incapable of achieving it. Buñuel's heavily-lidded impassivity provides a perfect note of calmness in contrast with the viciousness of the act he contemplates and finally executes. J. H. Matthews (in his *Surrealism and Film*) reports that Buñuel was physically sick after slicing through the animal's eye; it is a detail that has always cheered me up immensely. It was an action that it was necessary to do (for the sake of art, perhaps, though art considered as moral honesty rather than aesthetic delectation). It was necessary, first, to place oneself beyond the pale, beyond convention and propriety; secondly, it was necessary to put the audience in a similar frame of mind—to create a receptivity for what is to come. Film is a naturally realistic medium, and it requires a concerted effort (on the part of both film-maker and spectator) to break out of the restrictions of expectation that a film must proceed in a novelistic narrative manner. The opening sequence of *Un Chien Andalou* acts as a screen through which we must pass into the rest of the film. An eye is sliced by a razor, and the act considered as no more than a cloud passing across the moon; we have sat through that and now may acquiesce to anything.

Perhaps the most notable comment on the film was made by Buñuel in 1928 when

he called it 'in essence . . . only a desperate and passionate appeal to murder.' *Un Chien Andalou* is anarchic in the most complete sense of the word and this scene, as a microcosm of the film as a whole, is aimed at a liberation of both creator and viewer—an opening out of the mind to all its possibilities, even the most conventionally repugnant. If to be 'free' one must cut into an eye, then cut. This argument may be countered, however, with the assertion that such an act is not only conventionally repugnant and immoral, it is also naturally repugnant and immoral. Liberation of oneself may often only take the form of exploitation of others: the victim is 'liberated' in quite a different way.

In the second Surrealist manifesto, Breton declared, 'The simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd.' This radical and arbitrary act was seen by Breton as a product of the despair which is the counterpart of 'that gleam of light that Surrealism seeks to detect deep within us'; none the less, the exertion of that individual will leads to the destruction of several other individuals (it is easier to call them a crowd) who have no fault for that despair. They are, quite simply, independent and in no way an adjunct of that individual. Behind these ideas lies the spirit of de Sade, avenging angel of the ego in a vicious natural world, preaching satisfaction of one's desires, however it must be achieved. Yet the corruption of de Sade's beliefs into 'sadism' is not completely unfair, for the line between willing and unwilling victim is narrow and it is easy to step over from gratification into tyranny.

Yet, during the Terror, de Sade refused to participate in judicial murder; it is doubtful whether Breton could or would ever have pulled that trigger; and Buñuel is, by various accounts, kind to animals. The attempted liberation is to be as much mental as physical—to conceive of such actions rather than actually to execute them. But perhaps that is dishonesty on my part; perhaps I refuse to consider the ultimate implications of something that I can otherwise safely admire.

The two most shocking passages in *Un Chien Andalou* are the cut eye and the carcass-laden pianos, and it is instructive to compare them. Buñuel's revulsion can be contrasted with Dali's reported glee as he cut away at the donkey's lips and coated the eye sockets with glue. The result is 'grand guignol' melodrama compared with Buñuel's characteristic cool directness, which is not to say that it is not effective. Indeed, whereas the power of the film's prologue comes from an emotionless treatment of an emotional subject, there it is a peculiar mixture of horror and Keystone comedy that, hammed up to the hilt, is very disorienting. However, whereas the one I have already discussed in terms of an aesthetic and moral decisiveness, the other seems more describable as coming out of Dali's own personal morbidity. It is what it has become commonplace to call 'gratuitous' violence.

With the use of such a word, however, one treads on dangerous ground with the implication that violence, like sex, is

artistically acceptable if it has a 'purpose'. Gratuitousness excludes purpose. I have argued above that the 'purpose' of the cut eye is to disarm us for the rest of the film, yet this disarming in fact takes place without our noticing it. For the spectator, it must instead seem quite gratuitous, quite purposeless (and is meant to seem so), since for the viewer, as opposed to the filmmaker, 'purpose' is usually synonymous with 'meaning'. Part of the shock comes from this extreme situation in which we are placed with apparently no rationale.

The film, said Buñuel, 'means nothing'; it is a statement that may best be regarded with a sympathetic disbelief. The opening sequence is deliberately disconnected from the rest of the film. It is this lack of narrative context which again may make one consider the section 'meaningless'. However, meaning need not necessarily be narrative—it may just as surely arise from an individual action which may then be related to events occurring elsewhere. Reference has already been made to the sexual context of the scene, and beyond that, the film as a whole may best be read as an essay of sexual desire and the guilty inhibitions that prevent its satisfaction. So here, the woman's strange impassivity may be read as serenity; despite the violence of the man's assault upon her, her sexual mystery remains unrevealed. This is in marked contrast to her later appearance (her eye quite undamaged) where she has changed from a sexual object to an active participant with a desire that rivals that of the male; they seem to take it in turns to be libidinous and repressive.

There are other implications in the act

of slicing open the eye. It is a peculiarly effective attack upon our sensibilities since it is one point where we are most vulnerable, where our protective veneer is thinnest. Moreover, we are attacked in the very act of watching; the eyes that we are using to view the film are the same eyes that are thus threatened. But it is not only a physical threat that we are made to feel. The scene may be regarded as a metaphor for the need to cut beneath seen reality into a world of flux, a world within the brain, behind sight. Surrealism must approach the world, as Breton put it, 'with eyes closed'.

Susan Sontag, in her essay 'Against Interpretation', demanded a retreat from the fruitlessness of second-hand meaning-making toward a situation where we can be directly affected by physical action. So perhaps one should put an end to the search for 'meanings' within *Un Chien Andalou* and affirm that ultimately its effect must be thus—directly physical. Just as no amount of 'symbolism' may save physically unconvincing action, so no 'symbolic' reading may halt the movement of that razor. The convulsion and the queasiness may disappear, but what remains is the constant mental presence of our memory of it. Less powerful shock effects one may see through; this one views around—always aware of how one did and should react. It becomes a personal moral checkpoint. 'Beware of the dog—it bites' was Jean Vigo's comment on the film. And one must remember that the film's title is '*Un Chien Andalou*'. There is more than one mad dog and not all are safely in Andalusia.

So the eye is cut, the glutinous matter slides out, and 'Eight Years Later' . . . ■

The archetypal heroes of the comic, or serio-comic, films of Luis Buñuel such as *El* (1952), *Nazarin* (1958) and *Simon of the Desert* (1965) are pure, in either sense of the word: innocent, simple, homogeneous. They haven't a trace of deceit or hypocrisy and they aren't self-questioning or self-aware. Buñuel doesn't make *Nazarin* and *Simon* contradict their moral and religious principles. Instead, he makes them push these to their logical, absurd extreme. Yet the films reveal a dichotomy: the absoluteness of *Nazarin*, *Simon* and *Francisco*, which is their primary strength, is at the same time, in context, their primary weakness, their comic flaw. Buñuel puts his heroes in a multiple perspective which, in effect, defines character as primarily a matter of point of view. For example, in *El*, Francisco's wife tells the first half of the story and Francisco tells the second half, which at once moves in on him more closely and pulls further away, as Buñuel punctuates his wildly jealous fantasies with the comically placid realities. The character Francisco is seen to be at once cruel, in his wife's eyes, godlike, in his own eyes, and pathetically comic, in Buñuel's. He is, in effect, a synthesis of perceptions. He may be a one-track character, but the film's structure reveals his obsessiveness as multiform in its implications.

Nazarin too is an elemental Buñuel character. A priest in Mexico at the turn of the century, he leads an exemplary, modest, Christ-like existence, despite clerical (and anti-clerical) pressure. His example, however, is lost on his era's violent society. Although he believes that, living in it, he is a part of it, Buñuel shows that he's apart from it. If he is kind, it's with an impersonal kindness. He shelters an apparent murderer and prostitute not out of compassion, but strictly on Christian principle. For him, there is the principle and its particular application, but nothing in between.

As played by Francisco Rabal, *Nazarin* is mild, likeable, unprepossessing, and has a slight self-consciousness of movement that seems to come from self-effacement. But his subdued and matter-of-fact manner, although it effectively stifles self-importance or self-righteousness, also unfortunately stifles in him the possibility of spontaneity or responsiveness to others. But can he be blamed too badly if, while he's reinforcing the base of his character at one point, it's eroding at another? *Nazarin* seems to have a natural goodness of spirit which makes him somehow appealing even at his most didactic—perhaps especially then, when one can see a possibility of internal contradiction. Buñuel presents *Nazarin* as admirable from one angle, absurd from another; and the script, by Buñuel and Julio Alejandro, from a book by Benito Pérez Galdós, mocks his efforts to remain detached from himself and his environment. If he is detached, others are not: while *Nazarin*, oblivious to the smell of death, steps right in to a plague room to help a bawling baby, his two 'disciples', Beatriz and the prostitute Andara, can hardly bring themselves to enter at all. (Beatriz, an abortive suicide when her lover, Pinto, deserts her, longs for pure, platonic

'*Nazarin*': 'the priest who endures and almost invites so much physical indignity . . .'

NAZARIN: Buñuel's Comic Hero Revisited

Don Willis





Beatriz (Marga Lopez) and Nazarin (Francisco Rabal) by the campfire

love; which, unknown to her, is what she finds in Nazarin.)

Nazarin even goes to the country to be closer to nature (i.e. God), but finds country life as squalid and violent as city life. Human nature remains the same whatever the setting, and it's somehow appropriate that a priest who attempts to lead a truly Christian life is treated as if he must be a hypocrite. Yet if it is comically natural that the villagers who don't know him could accuse him of improper relations with the two women ('We're Christians here, you filthy pig!'), it is comically unnatural that those like his fellow priest Don Angel who do know him could *not* ('I know you're incapable of it'), in dovetailing ironies which reflect as much on the other parties as on Nazarin. If his spirituality constitutes one form of ignorance, his world's earthiness constitutes another. The exaggeration of both 'true' Christian and heathen/'false' Christian gives the film perfect comic symmetry.

The unpriestliness of other priests in *Nazarin* is played off against Nazarin's strict constructionism, which in turn is played off against peasant superstition/religion. All ground is quicksand. While Andara's 'metaphysical' questions betray her muddle-headedness—'Why are three vultures bad luck while two are good?' 'How can you release souls from purgatory by giving money to priests?'—they also give Nazarin the piquant problem of separating out Catholic dogma from pure superstition. His confidence and clarity on such points is no less amusing than her confusion. ('I shall answer your questions, but one by one.') The scene, with wry discretion on Buñuel's part, fades before he begins answering. Later, an army officer compels a man to salute him. As the peasant leaves, Nazarin (in nondescript clothes) steps forward, berates the colonel for his 'unchristian' attitude, and walks on. Another priest standing by explains: 'A heretic. One of those weird preachers we get from up north.' William S. Pechter, correcting

those who 'may be disposed to see merely the expression of an antipathy towards the clergy,' describes the scene as cutting two ways, displaying also 'all that is admirable in Nazarin.' But he overlooks the qualifying belatedness and semi-apologetic explanation—the bridled passion—of the outburst to the colonel. ('I felt duty bound to tell you this.') If the second priest is obviously a 'false Christian' in his hypocrisy, Nazarin is somewhat less obviously a 'true Christian' in his own application of Christian principles, which is here a little late, and is usually mechanical.

In the following sequence, Nazarin, trying to comfort a woman dying of the plague, instead confronts an order—personal, sexual—unknown to him. The woman's repeated whisper of her lover's name, Juan, is both comic and erotically charged—in her immovable insistence, in the lightning flash suggestiveness of the single word and in its very specific, last wish sensuality. A more worldly priest might take the rebuff in his stride, but carnality is *new* to Nazarin. If, previously, it was comically easy for him to dismiss the carnal, it's tragicomic justice that he now confronts it so brutally, so point-blank. The priest who endures and almost invites so much physical indignity withstands psychic brutality less well.

To Nazarin 'nature' means 'God'; but 'nature', in the film's context, means 'detachment'. In the city, he said he preferred the 'smell of flowers in the field' to Andara's perfume. The script later amplifies the meaning of this passing analogy—first, when Nazarin's agreement to take food in exchange for work on a construction crew erupts into violence as he leaves and, to the comically counterpointed sounds of gunfire coming from somewhere behind him, he absently plucks a leaf from an olive tree. Secondly, when much later, by a campfire, Beatriz rests her head on his shoulder as he idly picks up a snail and observes it. The tone of this scene is strangely idyllic-melancholic—any suggestions of St. Francis are decidedly ambivalent.

If, like Simon's blessing of the grasshopper, Nazarin's preoccupation with a snail is here contextually incongruous, it is to underscore a congruence of character. Nazarin tells a jealous Andara that he loves her and Beatriz equally, but fails to complete the equation: Beatriz=Andara=snail. The scene also completes another, larger equation: Nazarin's obliviousness to his complicity in violence is here equated with obliviousness to different levels in the natural order, different degrees of personal urgency.

Nazarin's own lack of ego allows him to reduce everyone and everything else to the same level of importance, or unimportance. His principled concern for all merges imperceptibly into unprincipled indifference. Nazarin is genuinely selfless, but equally to the point is that there would be little distinguishable difference if he were genuinely selfish. His generalised love translates into specific violence. His neutrality in physical affairs leaves him in effect bodiless, his passivity forcing others—in turn, Andara, a guard and a thief—to become his bodyguards.

Nazarin is arrested, apparently for aiding and abetting Andara, and put in jail. When another prisoner begins to beat the unresisting priest, a third pulls out a knife to defend him. The latter prisoner, the 'good thief', later tells him: 'I'm a thief, and you're a good man, and neither one of us is worth anything in the real world.' Nazarin is stunned and speechless. His abrupt, unexpected enlightenment violates, and in effect deactivates, the film's basic premise. For the missing link between Nazarin's absolute sense of purpose and the world's indifference is the idea of self-realisation. This is the comic-ironic key to the disparity between intention and actuality. Buñuel's calculated defusing here of *Nazarin's* comic mechanism is as brutal and deliberate a change of tone as the moment in *Sullivan's Travels* when the train hits the tramp. (Sturges' Sullivan/Gulliver, like Nazarin/Quixote, goes to the country and finds his over-starched attitudes changing, also thanks to fellow prisoners.) It is as if the self-ignorant Buñuel hero had been lifted up out of the narrative and given the opportunity of seeing himself from outside the film.

A brief last scene with Andara has a triple resonance: (1) Separated from Nazarin, she is on her own again; (2) She's still defending Nazarin; (3) She verbally assails the 'bad thief', who inflicted his transitory physical wounds, and, ironically or not, praises the 'good thief', who inflicted less superficial psychic wounds.

Nazarin's enlightenment proves cathartic; Beatriz' is closer to tragic. Her fits, like Myshkin's in *The Idiot*, finally kill her idealistic self. Beatriz' mother opens her eyes: 'You love that priest as a man.' Beatriz tries to fight her mother's words, falls into a frenzy of screaming and kicking, and her lover, Pinto, is called into the room to collect her. It is as if, in the trance-like, one-two-three progression of this scene, Nazarin had materialised in the room in the form of Pinto, as an objectification of her realisation. Two shots frame and complete this Nazarin-as-Pinto association of image and idea: the earlier one of Beatriz, her

head on Nazarin's shoulder, and the complementary shot of her with her head on Pinto's shoulder as his cart passes the shackled Nazarin. Her final, mild acquiescence to the physical is the calm after the fury of denial, the abjuration of the spiritual.

The retrospective light of *Viridiana* (1961) has perhaps been directed too strongly on the conclusion of *Nazarin*. The former film ends on a note of complete capitulation. But the simplicity of meaning of *Viridiana*'s joining in the card game should not be taken as the key to the more complicated tangle of implication left at the end of *Nazarin*, as an attempt by Buñuel to say the same thing differently, as if *Nazarin* too were an account of its hero's 'loss of faith' (as critics Peter Cowie, Ado Kyrou and William Pechter suggest). In the last sequence, Nazarin and his guard pass a woman standing by a wheelbarrow laden with fruit. The guard takes an apple. The woman asks about the prisoner. She offers Nazarin a pineapple, saying, 'Take it, and may God go with you.' Nazarin appears to be terrified, looks at the woman and the pineapple in her hand, and starts to walk on. He stops and turns again to accept the fruit eagerly, almost feverishly, saying, 'May God repay you, señora.' Then, in apparent torment and confusion, he continues walking up the road.

At the beginning of the film, Nazarin told his landlady, 'If you can spare me something through charity, God will repay you.' Shortly afterwards, he accepts and eats the tortillas Beatriz brings him from the landlady. He informs another visitor, 'If it becomes necessary, I beg . . . Alms don't degrade the recipient or harm his dignity.' Charity is nothing new to Nazarin. But in the early scenes his manner is light, almost flippant, as though charity were incidental rather than essential to his life and merely incidentally involved people. He doesn't even realise at first who Beatriz is or why she should be bringing him food. And when he tells the other visitor that he will accept his coins, he discreetly looks away from him.

The crux of *Nazarin* lies in the difference between his first, perfunctory 'God will repay you' and his powerfully felt reaction to the woman's act of charity at the end—the initial horror and the final, emotional 'May God repay you.' Nazarin's shock enlightenment in the prison linked beggary with thievery and uselessness; for him the pineapple is the objective correlative of the thief's words. Perhaps Buñuel, attempting to focus the meaning of the film on a brilliant pin-point, intends Nazarin (and the viewer) to see the stranger's unsolicited charity as at once negation and affirmation of his life. Thus the necessity for two separate reactions—Nazarin seeing at first as it were through the thief's eyes and realistic sensibility ('neither one of us is worth anything . . .'), then through his own eyes. Buñuel, who took his hero out of the film a few scenes earlier, now restores him to it, with an altered perspective. One can imagine Nazarin recognising, with strongly conflicting emotions, his own diminished meaning, or purpose, in the woman's modest purpose. Buñuel's discretion, however, makes the configuration of Nazarin's

new consciousness, if not a mystery, at least a matter of conjecture.

The primary polarity in *Nazarin* is not faith/lack of faith or even theism/humanism, but passion/detachment. What his society possesses in abundance, Nazarin initially lacks or suppresses. The film might best be characterised as a story of idealistic detachment transformed into idealistic passion, more closely related to Buñuel's next film, *La Fièvre Monte à El Pao* (1959), than to *Viridiana*. In that film Gérard Philipe plays, in Raymond Durnat's phrase, 'the Nazarin of secular politics', whose passivity Buñuel scrutinises more closely than his liberal principles. He too finally recognises his failings and this recognition prompts him to act, if a little too late.

J. Francisco Aranda interprets Nazarin's feelings at the end as a 'fertile doubt, a vital

despair that will accompany him to the end. . . Born a catholic, he will not cease to be one. But his faith has been shaken.' Earlier, one could see the potential for passion in Nazarin, in his reproof of the colonel and his barely suppressed anger at the prisoners who taunt him: 'I forgive you, but I despise you too and feel guilty that I cannot separate scorn from forgiveness.' At the end, Nazarin's comic denial of his emotions is no longer possible. The final psychic picture of him might be: far from detached, now doubting himself and his purpose, but seeing no better one, he presses on. In Nazarin's final fierceness there are overtones of insanity—if not in a clinical then in a practical sense, given his social context—of obsession, damnation as salvation and, perhaps most importantly, of heroism. ■

CET OBSCUR OBJET DU DESIR

David L. Overbey



'Cet Obscur Objet du Désir': Carole Bouquet, Fernando Rey

Mathieu, a wealthy man in late middle age, boards a train, then returns to the carriage entrance to dump a pail of water over the head of a rather bruised and battered young woman. The travellers sharing his compartment are so blatantly curious about his behaviour that he tells them his story. He became romantically and sexually obsessed by a new Spanish maid working for him in Paris. She evades his first advances, so he tracks her down. With the subtle aid of the girl's mother, a religiously pious woman who finds his money attractive, he makes arrangements for the girl to become his mistress. Although claiming to love him, Conchita steadily refuses to let him make love to her, saying that if he takes her virginity he will no longer love her. Constantly

teasing him sexually, she flaunts at him a young man who may be her lover, until Mathieu has her deported. Finding her again by accident, he offers to buy her a house and to support her so that she can leave the night club where she dances nude for tourists. With deed and key to the house in hand, she again locks him out and taunts him with the young man. The next morning she reappears to tell him it was all a joke and that she loves only him. He beats her and leaves to board the train.

At the end of his story, the girl appears suddenly to pour water over his head. They next appear to be 'reconciled', once again arguing while shopping. After watching a seamstress repairing nightgowns in a shop window, they are walking on when a bomb

explodes and flames fill the screen. This final explosion is perhaps connected to a series of other bombings, shootings and clubbings which have taken place at various times throughout the story; incidents of terrorism in which Mathieu and Conchita have shown only the most fleeting interest.

At 77, Luis Buñuel has not only survived, he has prevailed. Times have changed, of course, as demonstrated by the director's recent appearance at the San Sebastian Festival for a retrospective homage to his work and the screening of his new, 32nd film, *Cet Obscur Objet du Désir*. His films no longer cause moral consternation and widespread shock. The new film is not only making the festival circuit, it is one of the big hits of the Paris season; the long queues waiting to see it on the Champs-Élysées last summer were shocking only to French distributors who have long refused to open important films during *les vacances* because 'no one is in Paris'. If the times and the audiences have changed, however, Buñuel himself has not. His goals and major themes have remained consistent since his 1928 *Un Chien Andalou*, a film he once characterised as 'a direct call to murder'. In applying his corrosive wit, sedulous analysis and satiric scalpel to the values and social structure of bourgeois capitalist Christianity in *Cet Obscur Objet*, Buñuel seems to be suggesting that his 'call to murder' has been answered by the victims to be, who turn murder into a collaborative suicide.

Based on Pierre Louÿs' novel *La Femme et le Pantin*, *Cet Obscur Objet du Désir* is the fourth filmed version of the tale. Jacques De Baroncelli's 1929 film with Conchita Montenegro remains almost unknown because never screened, while Julien Duvivier's 1958 version starring a pouty, inadequate Brigitte Bardot remains merely unwatchable. The most famous version, of course, is Josef von Sternberg's 1935 *The Devil is a Woman*, which (through one of those minor but amusing historical coincidences) like Buñuel himself got into trouble with the Spanish authorities. Sternberg, for all his cold irony, remained firmly entrenched within the confines of the romantic melodrama, for his creation of Conchita/Dietrich as the archetypal *femme fatale* only enmeshed us further in her fascinating cruelty. His title indicates where he placed moral responsibility, reducing the male characters almost literally to Louÿs' *pantins*.

Buñuel approaches the Louÿs material in the opposite way. He too is attracted by all-pervasive but frustrated desire, and by the sado-masochistic obsessive attachment of an older man for a young woman—themes permeating his films from the beginning—but, as ever, we are not allowed to participate in the romantic/sexual obsessions of the characters. It is the fact, process and results of obsession and desire which are under dissection here. As the title indicates, the object of that desire, while not unimportant, remains obscure, for it may be that within this context the very frustration of desire is desire's true objective. If that is indeed the case, *Cet Obscur Objet du Désir* indicates that Buñuel has begun to despair; his characters here no longer wrestle against the forces of repression and frustration but collaborate and embrace them, and in so

doing embrace death.

Far from creating a fascinatingly romantic image of desire à la Dietrich, Buñuel destroys that very idea. When Maria Schneider departed from the cast, he returned to his original conception of using two women to play Conchita. French actress Carole Bouquet and Spanish dancer Angela Molina alternate in the role. Although the first is slim and delicate, and the latter full of figure and more sensual, they are not used to illustrate two aspects of Conchita. They are used interchangeably, arbitrarily, with one often beginning a scene and, after a brief cut away, the other finishing it. The point is not so much that the lover sees the beloved in a multiplicity of guises, as that, once he has 'decided' to desire her, he probably doesn't see her at all. The almost surrealistic melting of one woman into another serves to unnerve us and to make the object of desire even more obscure. In being thus distanced from the object, we are forced to find the lover and his love more than a little ludicrous.

Possible reactions to his tale are also satirised through the film's framing device. Each of Mathieu's fellow travellers has a different reaction to his story. A conservative French judge talks about ending terrorism through harsh punishment; a dwarf psychologist offers psychological 'insights' without once being helpful or to the point; a 'respectable' middle-class woman sends her daughter into the corridor so that she can listen with open delight to the more salacious details of the story. They all agree with Mathieu that 'Conchita is the worst of women'—that 'the devil is a woman', indeed—but seem to find nothing disturbing about Mathieu's own behaviour. Nor do they seem to notice that the 'unexplained' series of acts of social and political terrorism which accompany and punctuate Mathieu's story are linked directly to their own system of values. While they condemn Conchita's emotional and sexual terrorism (she is, after all, an 'object' removed from the first-class carriage), they ignore their own and that of religion, economics, psychology, law, marriage, motherhood, virginity—all of which are subjected to Buñuel's satirical scrutiny. Their reaction to the acts of literal terrorism is a smug complacency and deluded 'understanding', or, that failing, a cry for violent repression.

By beating Conchita and then dumping a pail of water over her, Mathieu believes that he has broken the chain of illusions which would have led to his self-destruction.

Buñuel on set with Fernando Rey



His 'understanding', however, is merely another illusion, for it has led to no change at all in his basic values or desires. Awaiting destruction, he is thus doomed once more to embrace his Conchita, while contemplating with a fetishist's mounting excitement a seamstress attempting to repair the lace of a bloodstained nightgown which may or may not have been taken from a burlap sack we see him carrying from time to time throughout the film. The sack is left in a display window as Mathieu and Conchita continue to argue and walk along a gallery away from the camera, which is placed in such a position as to suggest that the final, consummately destructive explosion and fire has its origin in that sack.

It is never possible, nor even desirable, to build too exact an intellectual scheme based on individual 'symbols' in Buñuel's films. Obviously, he works less with strictly formulated theories and structures than with almost instinctive images growing naturally from the narrative. Still, it is difficult not to connect recurring patterns of objects between one film and another. That burlap sack which Mathieu carries (similar to one slung over the shoulder of a passing workman glimpsed momentarily midway through the film) reminds one immediately of the burden pulled by the man in *Un Chien Andalou*. A heavy load of social and moral values, perhaps. That one load is comprised of nightgowns and the other of piano, pumpkins, priests and donkeys is beside the point; that exploding sack serves the same function, save that one hinders and the other destroys completely.

The chastity pants made of whipcord and leather lacings, which Conchita dons the more to frustrate Mathieu, are the mirror image of the sewing paraphernalia which the husband smuggles into the bedroom of his sleeping wife in *El*. From *Viridiana* to *Tristana*, the presence of Fernando Rey—here dubbed into French by an uncredited Michel Piccoli, no doubt to soft-pedal the Spanish elements in Louÿs' story by avoiding Rey's Spanish-accented French—links Mathieu to earlier incarnations of older men obsessed by passion.

While such connections provide an enriching sub-text of alternative treatments of situations, characters and themes, the new film can stand superbly well on its own. It is Buñuel's most effective and disturbing film in years. It is more subtle than either *Le Charme Discret de la Bourgeoisie* or *Le Fantôme de la Liberté*. Its humour is less obvious, less accessible, but far more corrosive; its structure more sophisticated in so far as it both creates a hallucinatory world within what seems at first to be a typical melodramatic structure and then itself comments on that world in almost equally hallucinatory terms. *Cet Obscur Objet du Désir* is also Buñuel's most moving film in years. For all his pitiless flaying of every sort of human behaviour, he reveals unsuspected well-springs of sympathy for the ridiculous characters trapped within the shell of decayed social and moral values. Although the insights of his wit, directed against 'them', are as fresh as ever, this time we are left with a whole world whose evident object of desire when less obscurely seen may well be self-destruction. That final flaming image must, after all, include all of 'us' as well. ■

Michael Balcon

1896-1977



Sir Michael Balcon, one of the most respected and influential men in the history of British cinema (or, as Ivor Montagu writes, 'the best thing that ever happened to the British film industry'), died on October 17, aged 81. We publish tributes by Ivor Montagu, who worked with him closely, particularly in the pre-war period; Michael Relph, who with Basil Dearden formed one of the notable producer-director teams at Ealing, and who succeeded Sir Michael as Chairman of the BFI Production Board, and Alfred Hitchcock.

Sir Michael published his autobiography, *A Lifetime in Films*, in 1969; the achievement of Ealing has recently been analysed at length in Charles Barr's book *Ealing Studios* (1977), which was the subject of an article in our Summer 1977 issue.

Islington and the Bush

Working for Mick Balcon was a very personal affair. It was like a rather odd sort of marriage. You could quarrel and break away, but neither side lost a friend. The tie was an elastic one—it could stretch but not snap. I know. He never bore a grudge. I walked out on him twice and got the sack once (not his doing), but no matter how far off you might go, you would always find the door unlatched for you if you cared to come back and ring the bell. What was this bond between Mick and so many of the creative or technical people who worked for him and became his host of friends? I think it was just that they found out that he, like them, really enjoyed making films.

So many of the tycoons who have engaged in film-making in this country have ranked the occupation as a very secondary and only incidental purpose. The primary one has been fame, fortune or, at lower echelons, a temporary bread-ticket. Certainly not motives to be despised. But with Mick these were emphatically not the aims that made him tick. He was a modest man who did not covet fame—it might be pleasant but it was unsought—and for him the cash about which every film-maker must care was valuable simply as the means to go on making films.

Mick's achievement was tied up with three place names: Islington, Shepherd's Bush and Ealing. I was with him at all three. The rest was mere interval or coda.

I met Mick before ever I went to work for him, at one of Adrian Brunel's hate parties. A 'hate party'—contrariwise to its name—was a most jovial and constructive

affair, usually in Adrian's flat. With Babs Brunel as hostess the changes were rung upon a group of friends—Mick and Aileen, Victor Saville, maybe Hitchcock or Herbert Wilcox, Miles Mander, Alex (Sasha) and Leila Stewart were a few—who met together after a Film Society afternoon or the latest première of some new German silent to chew the rag about what we had seen and argue about all we hated in the way of films and how we meant to better them.

Then, suddenly, through Adrian, came a summons from Mick. Gainsborough had a white elephant film—an Islington product that they dared not show. The distributor said it was too highbrow. Which is—I suppose—why Mick thought of me, barely a year down from Cambridge and as yet unsullied by the studio grind. (The poacher turned gamekeeper principle, or else 'at least I couldn't make it any worse'.) A few weeks passed and I found myself with a sort of roving authority over embryo script department (days) and editing department (nights as well). A few months more and I was (not unnaturally) tired, irritable and ready to pick a quarrel with anybody and march out at the drop of a pin.

I would say Islington was Mick's apprenticeship in the film jungle. His lifetime search—not only to make pictures, and pictures he liked, but to make them surrounded by and happy among people he liked—had not yet fully taken shape in his mind. He had not yet perhaps fully appreciated the dependence of one aim upon the other, but was progressing toward it guided by his instinct and his own nature.

Islington in those days had had ups and downs. Mick had had his first success there—*Woman to Woman*, with an American star, Betty Compson. Graham Cutts' 'Rat' pictures with Ivor Novello were making money. And Hitch was launched on his way. But it was not a happy ship. Elder directors would bitch against younger ('I knew him when . . .') or defensively put obstacles in the way of those they feared. One director was so frightened of being asked to make concessions and yielding to Mick's charm and persuasion that he refused even to speak to him while making a picture and kept a tame solicitor on the floor via whom all intercourse must pass.

I don't think we chatterboxes in the studio as yet clearly understood the full pressures under which a producer of those days had to work. It was not enough to have technical flair—to choose subject, directors, stars, writers and staff in a mixture the public would like and pay for—you also had to have the patience and aptitude to comfort, and keep sweet, crotchety distributors, dumb exhibitors and (sometimes) venal pressmen if the pictures were to reach the box office at all.

Beset by such monsters, it was natural that then (and later) Mick in extremity would sometimes count on readiness for sacrifice from those who loved him most. Not in vain, though equally naturally sometimes these felt sore. I say now with firm hindsight, however, that Mick was the very best thing that ever happened to the British film industry, that he never made a compromise that wasn't necessary, that to be able to live with philistines within and without the industry and at the same time cushion



Michael Balcon with one of his stars of the 1930s, Jessie Matthews

their impact upon his colleagues, and retain their affection and respect, was a talent more rare than rubies. But what it cost him! He had to live on his nerves.

By comparison Shepherd's Bush was a bed of roses. Here everything was on a grander and more stable scale. A grandiose studio, with everything that in those days one might require. (Though teething troubles occurred, of course. Our chief sound engineer put an orchestra on the principal sound stage, closed all the sound-proof doors, and then played to Mick a perfectly adequate track he had recorded of it from several yards outside them.) There were bigger budgets, broader subjects, toppier stars. All provided by a merger of Gainsborough with (and as) Gaumont-British, under the aegis of the remarkable Ostrer brothers. The senior lived in exalted stratospheres, dreaming (and writing) of gold. The next, a tough guy, held up the business end in a West End fort. The third, delicate and aesthetic, hovered over the studio, a nominal watchdog for its finance. And the earthiest was a lovable but occasionally confused unit production manager on my first directorial assignment. They were nice men, but collectively they knew about as much about film production as the proverbial old boot. Clever men, however, can make up for not knowing things by knowing their limitations. They left much to Mick. It must have been galling to Mick not to be allowed a production credit on any of our films, but he had (in my judgment) far more practical liberty than at Islington in forming his own crews and building his own programmes. Whoever were the owners Mick was the captain, and he it was who marked the charts and sailed us across the seas.

I came back, because once more I was sent for. The phone caught me at my desk at the *Daily Worker*. Crisis, and Mick must have remembered his trouble-shooter. A remake of a musical due to go on the floor in exactly three days time, no one else free or available, and a script so flatulent it needed at least £10,000* taken out of it before

shooting started. After that I stayed as an Associate Producer (which I had meanwhile learned in Hollywood is the lowest form of animal life). Mind you, existence was not without its excitements even at the Bush. There was one occasion when Mick had gone off on one more of the perennial efforts of all United Kingdom film-makers to break into the USA—two weeks he was to be across the sea, but this was quite enough for his temporary viceroy to inform Hitch and me (who had just had *The Man Who Knew Too Much* breaking box-office records wherever it was played and now had *The Thirty-Nine Steps* script completed and ready to go on the floor) that our new scenario was rubbish, and unless we consented to drop it in the w.p.b. and start work at once on the musical he wanted on a life of Leslie Phillips (or some such name), a deceased Irish music-monger of some note, we should both be out on our ears. (Mick and the U.S. cavalry got back only just in time.)

But on the whole those were good days opposite the Lime Grove baths. Mick had got together a good crowd. A nucleus of his old stalwarts: his brother Shan (Chandos) in unit management, Miss Dicker tackling the labs., George Gunn who had mastered sound; and sprinkled among them gifted novices, Angus MacPhail—an old side-kick of mine from Cambridge at the scenario department who was to prove such a power on the Ealing comedies—and a whole catalogue of other names that later made their mark.

Incidentally, before war approached and brought changes, Mick it was whose innovating courage and sense of justice enabled a great leap forward toward ending cheater and rubbish standards in the industry. Fly-by-night half phoney film flotations, under-scheduling and under-budgeting relying on unlimited emergency overtime, bankruptcies that left the film-makers themselves last in the queue for the

* In those days about 25 per cent of the budget.

kitty and usually in the lurch—these were commonplace in the dark days. The A.C.T. was formed to fight them, but unions were a novelty in the studios at that period and at first it was hard going. Mick broke the deadlock. I remember the drama. Pressure was heavy on him to stymie the approach of the A.C.T. by forming a company union. But this was not his way. The entire studio staff was summoned to a great meeting on the largest stage—which Mick himself, it was said, would come and address, unveiling the great ‘company’ plan to all. We waited. The hour struck. We waited still. The plotters sent messages to hale him from head office. Still no Mick. At last I had the honour myself to annex the vacant chair, drink from the ritual glass of water, and adjourn the meeting. Next day, Michael Balcon (as he still was) and H. G. Boxall signed the *real* agreement with our General Secretary, George Elvin. Where G.B. led, the battle was half-won.

Presently I left once more, this time not for a whim but as so many of my generation did, for Spain. I did not rejoin Mick again until the war was done, and this time he called me—to Ealing—not to tackle trouble but because he had a subject to be written he thought just cut out for me.

I am glad to have spent a time there. I think he was happier and freer, more relaxed, than I had ever seen him, in a set-up wholly among colleagues whom he had chosen and cherished. It was no accident that the comedies were so marked a feature. He could indulge the confidence and lightness of heart so often overlain by anxiety in earlier days. I would sum up thus the three phases of his unique contribution to British film-making: pioneering in terra largely incognita, establishing standards, and a sunset joy-ride.

Not of course that we didn’t fight like cat and dog as usual. That is how one makes pictures.

IVOR MONTAGU

Ealing and After

So familiar is the revered image of elder statesman or founding father, that it is hard to recall the young Micky Balcon—international film tycoon. Slim and immaculate, driven by nervous energy to the edge of breakdown, he was producing a programme of over twenty films annually for Gaumont British at the time I joined their new Shepherd’s Bush studios as a 16-year-old apprentice.

It was characteristic that, although heavily under the influence of the then powerful German industry, he was planning for a British future by initiating an apprenticeship scheme whereby young technicians and writers could learn from the more experienced foreign film-makers he employed. Much British talent was already having its chance, and Alfred Hitchcock, Victor Saville and Walter Forde were making pictures for him alongside foreign directors like Anatole Litvak, Berthold Viertel and Raoul Walsh. Launder and Gilliat, Angus MacPhail and Charles Bennett were established writers and Christopher Isherwood a new recruit. Producers like Ivor Montagu and Ian Dalrymple were working alongside such

continental colleagues as Josef Somlo and Hermann Fellner. I myself had my training as an art director from the German designer Alfred Junge.

Although not neglecting to plan for a future British industry, Balcon’s pursuit of the elusive international film continued. A lucrative contract with MGM took him to Hollywood to learn, at first hand, the ways of Louis B. Mayer before taking over as his production head in Britain. Tampering with his script of *A Yank at Oxford* by a number of Hollywood hacks, including the sadly burnt out case Scott Fitzgerald, helped to turn his stay in California into aversion therapy of a highly effective kind. In spite of the fact that *A Yank at Oxford*, made from the original script by Sidney Gilliat, turned out to be a big commercial success, it was to be the only film Balcon made for MGM before he received a happy release from his contract.

A short period of independent production in partnership with his old friend Walter Forde produced *The Ware Case* and *The Gaunt Stranger* and renewed his association with Reg Baker, a clever accountant who had been involved with him at Gainsborough and was now the business head of Ealing Studios. When Basil Dean decided to return to his work in the theatre, Baker and the Courtaulds (his financial backers) invited Michael Balcon to join the Ealing board and take over as head of production.

In 1938 at the age of 44, in a small pine-panelled office leading on to a suburban garden, Balcon began what he has called the happiest and most rewarding period of his working life. I don’t think that Mick ever considered himself to be best suited to being a single-picture producer, although he did it very well. He was essentially an impresario, in the very highest sense of that term, and at Ealing he was free to follow his own intuition to an extent that he had not been able to when controlled by the financial interests of C. M. Woolf, the Ostrers, or Louis B. Mayer. I was fortunate to be one of the young men that he gathered around him there, starting as art director and then becoming a producer and writer.

The Ealing period was remarkable, one can say unique, in that Balcon provided a group of British film-makers with a benign environment in which to develop their talents, free from the financial pressures of hustling in the market-place. He took those pressures (and they were often considerable) upon his own shoulders, and the bucks stopped at his desk. They came from two directions. On the one hand his financial backers held him responsible for the results of his production teams’ work; and on the other, the production teams put all possible pressure upon him to get their creative projects approved, often with insufficient consideration for the commercial pressures against which he protected them. To appreciate Balcon’s qualities it is worth putting the Ealing operation, as I knew it, briefly under the microscope.

The development of projects and the production of individual films was in the hands of two-men teams comprising a director and an associate producer—later accorded the title of producer. Balcon, as studio chief, was of course in overall control—at first with the ‘Producer’ title on all films, and later with ‘A Michael

Balcon Production’ credit. The creative responsibility for individual films, however, lay with these producer-director teams and it was in their composition that Balcon’s flair as an impresario was of vital influence. Nearly all the members of these teams at Ealing were promoted from the shop floor, and in every one of our cases he took a risk in doing so. How, on such a scale, could this happen today—and who would take the risks that Balcon took?

The people he employed shaped the studio policy, which was hammered out at the famous round-table meetings over which he presided. When that policy went wrong he knew when to change course. For instance, early in the war, he could see that films like *Ships with Wings* portrayed a fictionalised view of war that was not in tune with the times. Echoing his earlier involvement with Flaherty’s *Man of Aran*, he turned towards the documentary movement and brought Cavalcanti and Harry Watt to Ealing. Cavalcanti’s influence, particularly, was crucial in developing the style of film-making that became associated with Ealing; and it was an inspirational stroke of Balcon, the impresario, to find the precise ingredient needed to act as catalyst for the mixture of talents that he had gathered together.

After the war he was active in industry politics, advising the government on much of the films legislation that exists to this day. As adviser to the NFFC he devised the group schemes which sought to spread Ealing’s method of work in a wider field. The major combines did not, however, give sufficient support to the groups associated with them, and Group 3, which showed initial promise, finally failed for lack of a Michael Balcon to run it. For all Grierson’s ability, he was too volatile a talent, and teaming him with the down-to-earth John Baxter tended to cancel out their respective abilities.

In the increasingly hostile climate of the post-war years he saw the vital necessity of enabling new film-makers to show their paces, and he created the Experimental Film Fund which later became the BFI Production Board. He was the Chairman until I took over from him four years ago.

How welcome to the young film-makers of today would be the sort of environment that Ealing provided; and how greatly missed will be the one man who might have devised a way for the British industry to preserve its integrity and commercial viability under international pressures more acute than those he encountered over forty years ago. The best memorial to Michael Balcon will be the creation of a structure, within the British film industry, that will foster talent as he did throughout his long and brilliant career.

MICHAEL RELPH

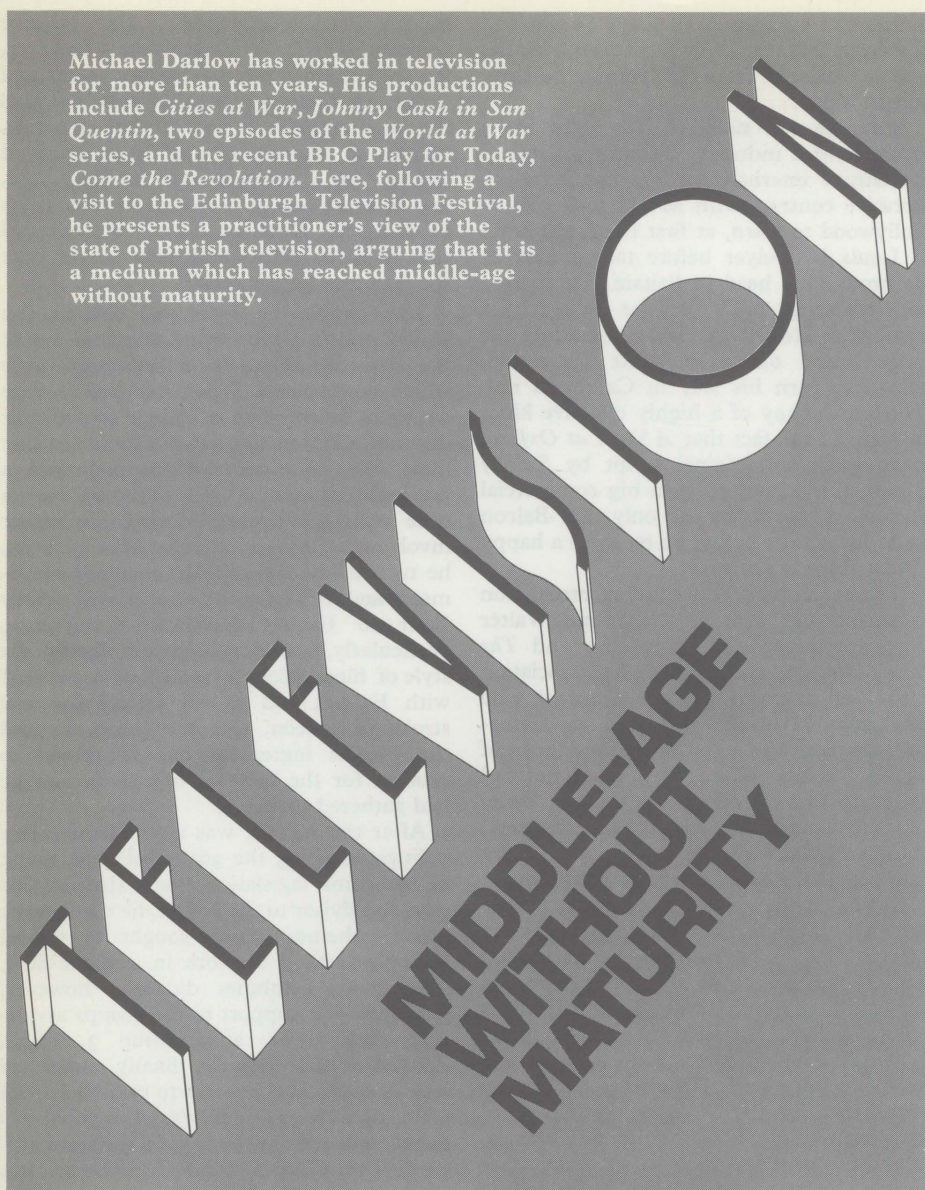
Hitchcock

‘Mick’ Balcon gave me my first job as an Assistant Director, also my first job as Screenplay Writer and afterwards Art Director.

Such faith in me at the beginning of my career demands the greatest gratitude to his memory.

ALFRED HITCHCOCK

Michael Darlow has worked in television for more than ten years. His productions include *Cities at War*, *Johnny Cash in San Quentin*, two episodes of the *World at War* series, and the recent BBC Play for Today, *Come the Revolution*. Here, following a visit to the Edinburgh Television Festival, he presents a practitioner's view of the state of British television, arguing that it is a medium which has reached middle-age without maturity.



Michael Darlow

During recent years the future of television's institutions and their financing, the medium's political independence and public accountability, the number of channels and the challenges of developing technology, have been under continuous debate. So the announcement of a television festival in Edinburgh, which was to take the form of a symposium (rather than another expense account scramble for prizes) where producers, directors, writers and critics would consider, free of the daily pressures of transmission schedules or the need for politicking in the face of would-be censors or commissions of enquiry, the material they put before the public, was obviously welcome.

The Edinburgh International Television Festival should, I believe, be welcomed not for its achievements in its first year but because it has the potential to trigger off a body of writing and thinking without which the deterioration in British television will accelerate, no matter what organisational changes may come about, until (despite chauvinistic blinkers) we find ourselves with a service as bad as, and perhaps identical to, those overseas services which we affect to despise.

The Festival opened with a keynote lecture by Marcel Ophuls, who attacked the unimaginative puritans he sees in control of television. During the four days that followed there were screenings of past and present work related to discussion sessions. The area of debate was limited to television drama, though this did not prevent contributions from ranging further: one could draw inferences for the whole span of the medium from

what was said, seen and written. The major loss resulting from limiting the debate to drama was that it discouraged people from fields outside drama from attending—thus depriving the conference of contributions from documentarists, who include most of the best users of film in television (many of the most highly regarded drama directors have their roots in documentary), and from those working in light entertainment, where

much productive pioneering has been done (especially by the BBC in comedy) and where imaginative use is made of video techniques. (There is more creative use of the electronic possibilities in one *David Essex Show* than in almost the whole output of the Drama and Arts Features departments of all the networks in an entire season.) Concentration on 'drama' also helped reinforce departmentalism, which I see as a major barrier to the development of television as a mature medium in its own right.

The Festival commissioned a useful series of discussion papers, of which the most striking was perhaps Dennis Potter's paper on 'Realism and Non-Naturalism' in drama, which exposed one of the diseases of today's television. Potter argued that 'a preoccupation with styles of production has almost completely blanked out more meaningful debate, such as that about the choices between "naturalism" and its alternatives—choices that have too often been reduced to discussion about mere techniques. Perhaps the lack of a long critical tradition, the inevitable confusion of roles and purposes which make the word "television" a plural noun . . . the continued ignorance and Philistinism of its planners and administrators have together brought about this sterility . . . Never in the entire history of drama in all its forms has so much been produced for so large an audience with so little thought.' What Potter says about drama applies equally to the other television disciplines.

Much the best of the discussion at Edinburgh was dominated by playwrights. However, whether defending the embattled single play or debating the relative claims of realism and naturalism, it was striking that in a television festival all seemed to take their intellectual premises from an older, and one might have thought alien, tradition—the theatre. Notably absent from the discussions were any contributions one could recognise as the authentic voice of a developing intellectual tradition in television. The programme makers were mainly silent or inarticulate. It was a pity in many ways that the issue which raised the most passion was that hoary television perennial, censorship. It obscured what should have been the Festival's focus—a demonstration that television is starved of the nourishment of a self-aware critical theory of its own; deprived of sound intellectual foundations with results that look ever more fatal.

Delegates had already been given the opportunity to see Dennis Potter's banned play *Brimstone and Treacle*, and many were in a state of suppressed rage that such a fine play had been refused transmission. These feelings duly boiled over into protests to the BBC. But I have an uneasy feeling that we programme makers sometimes allow ourselves to enjoy an exaggerated excitement about such issues (however deserving the cause) as a kind of substitute for confronting a more difficult question—a nagging sense of loss of vitality in our own programme making. The real malaise of television has little to do with censorship or political control or the allocation of the fourth channel. It lies with programme makers themselves.

I am not suggesting that programmes can be considered in isolation from the financial or institutional circumstances in which they are made. And I certainly don't think that

what happens to the fourth television channel is unimportant; indeed I would go so far as to say that the awarding of the fourth channel to the ITV lobby would almost certainly have the effect of slamming the final nail into the coffin of television in this country as a vital, forward-looking or innovatory creative medium. I am horrified by the unholy alliance between the ITV contractors, the technicians' unions and the Conservative Party, compounded of shortsighted self-interest and a disregard for the creative health of the medium or the public's need for a wider range of programming. Better there be no fourth channel than something which does not conform to Annan's idea of an Open Broadcasting Authority—at least in so far as it must be committed to showing 'productions which say something new in new ways' and be free of the BBC's and the IBA's responsibility for the content of programmes and obligation to ensure 'a balanced evening's viewing'. If the ITV companies have the spare capacity and under-utilised talent they claim, why don't they use some of their profits to replace some of their worn out series, bottom of the barrel films and shoddy imports? The technicians would seem to have subdued their normal suspicions of their employers not so much to preserve their jobs as to effect easier promotion without risk of insecurity for their members, in an industry where there is too little opportunity for advancement because so many people joined it at the same time and now have the same age and seniority. (The hostility shown in recent years towards freelancers is in part a symptom of the same problem.) But programme makers who are not prepared to risk moving out of secure staff jobs for the chance of making programmes for an OBA are unlikely to be the sort of people who will take risks in the programmes they are making now.

For fear of being misunderstood, I must also place on record that I deplore the increasing incidence of censorship in television, particularly what can be called creeping institutional censorship—decisions not to make or transmit certain programmes, often made by individual managers and not open to public questioning. I welcome some of Annan's proposals on this, especially the idea that programme makers should have the chance to defend their own work in front of their accusers. Programme makers must get into the habit of taking responsibility for what they do, and it is right that they should defend their decisions; they must learn (or as I shall argue, re-learn) to be articulate about their programme intentions and the means they employ to realise them. It is a healthy discipline and would go some way to answer the politicians' charges of harlotry—power without responsibility.

The Festival was deflected back to more central issues by Charles Barr's paper on 'Criticism and TV Drama'. Barr pointed television back to the only possible source of any critical theory. He tells us that if we want to understand the essence of television we must do as film theorists do and look back to the formative years of the medium. He points out that for many years it was 'essentially a relay device, relaying performances of pre-existing drama alongside its relays of other existing items like sporting events and public ceremonial, and cinema newsreels. Most of

the more original-seeming items fitted this pattern too: a speaker doing a prepared turn in the studio, a visit by outside broadcast cameras to a given location. We might ponder the fact that the man appointed by Reith to set up the initial TV service was at the time the Head of Radio's Outside Broadcasting.'

For years after the start of television, it was taken for granted that the material broadcast was not original to TV. Barr continues: 'In some degree we are still, deep down, conditioned to see TV drama as the "relay". Because so much else in current broadcasting stays close to the original OB model (sport, public events). Because the technology of studio drama is still modelled on the original technology, with the action existing in the round and the cameras looking in from outside and recording . . . in continuous blocks . . . the system as a whole still gives a privileged position to the pre-existing written text . . . Many factors support this privileging of the text, including (a) studio technology itself, obviously; (b) an administrative system which favours the rapid, reliable processing of approved scripts.'

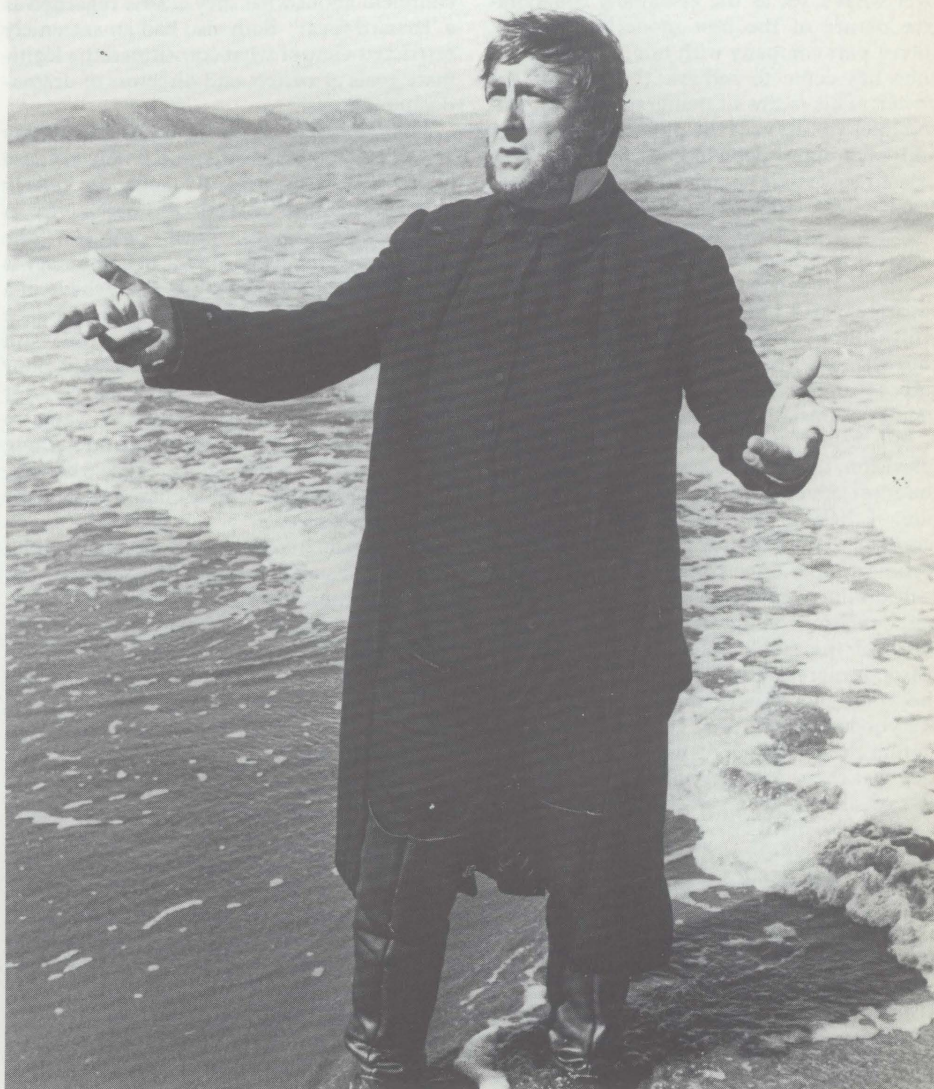
Barr's brief was drama, but what he says applies to other disciplines within television. Having pointed out the historical background to the pre-eminence of writers within television, Barr notes that 'directorial "authors" have scarcely been identified

except for a few such as Loach and Russell who worked on film, not video.' He concludes by reminding us that John McGrath ended his 1976 MacTaggart Lecture (reprinted in *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Spring 1977) with 'an eloquent call for theoretical thinking about the medium. Let it be theory based not just on *Z Cars* and after, but theory which encompasses the evolution of the medium as a whole.'

The importance of Barr's paper is that if we are to think constructively about the medium his is the necessarily fundamental approach. Unfortunately, the paper triggered only a half-hearted debate. Perhaps the programme makers were intimidated by a panel of critics, or perhaps the critics' own self-denigration silenced what could have been a bloody confrontation. Critics seem not to realise even the immediate effect they have on programmes—programme makers do read them (and sometimes take note). Reviews, especially good ones, circulate in boardrooms; they become weapons in the hands of both programme makers and executives in the perpetual battle over which programmes get made, who makes them, what resources are allocated. The better the quality of press criticism the better, at least, the quality of the weapons in the hands of the combatants.

I said earlier that the debate between the playwrights, triggered off by Dennis Potter's paper, seemed to draw its quality from the

Alan Badel in Dennis Potter's 1975 BBC play 'Where Adam Stood', based on Edmund Gosse's 'Father and Son'



long tradition of drama criticism. In much of what they said there was an implied, and sometimes explicit, distaste for directors whom they saw as taking their creative babies and maltreating them in production. When James Cellan Jones, BBC Head of Plays, intervened to say that he liked to think his job was putting writers and directors together to collaborate as creative teams, he drew little response. I am bound to say that the writers, while rightly defending the single play from the encroaching blight of the serial and formula series, seemed also to be defending their own role in a concept of television that goes back to the 'relay device, relaying performances of pre-existing drama'. Potter's paper had been a plea for the individual statement which could break up the usually unbroken chain of hucksters' cries that constitutes a normal evening's viewing—all the programmes becoming ever more like the commercials so that they all 'look as though they are selling something . . . but what it is the programmes are selling is not immediately apparent.' He concluded that the best naturalist and realist drama stands out from the flood of urgent but empty images, and reminds the viewer that 'he is at least watching a play *A Play A Play*.'

As long as Potter means by this repetition any single programme that stands out from the surrounding clamorous mush, both through its form and its content, as a clear and individual creative statement, then I am with him. If, however, he means to reassert the primacy of the pre-existing written text over what I see as the essentially collaborative nature of the best modern television, then I part company with him. I suggest the time has come to rethink the role of the writer. This is not to denigrate writers, but to achieve a fusion of the different disciplines and techniques which have for too long existed separately in television, largely as a result of the Outside Broadcast mentality of the early days. I believe that the medium will only achieve maturity when it understands itself well enough not only to identify its separate parts but to fuse them in a way which means that the best programmes are those which are unquestionably television rather than broadcast plays, interviews, documentary films, operas, etc.

It is a fact, much remarked upon inside television, that a disproportionate number of the most admired programmes are made on film. I believe the main reason for this has little to do with the commonly advanced technical superiorities of film over video-tape—flexibility of editing, ease of location shooting, precision of lighting and framing because of the single set-up technique. The reason is more fundamental and goes back to the traditions inherited by directors and everybody else who has been trained to work on film. Film-makers do not set out with the idea that their task is simply to find the best way of shooting a given script or covering a particular piece of action. This is particularly true of those who come from the documentary tradition—as many television film-makers do. The film is seen as an entity in itself. For instance, one does not simply look for the best shot of a man crossing the road but asks whether that particular shot advances the story and purpose of the film as a whole; equally one collects material that will be selected, refined, balanced against other material during the editing process.

This is a quite different approach from that of the theatre or the traditional studio television director and his team. I believe that the film-like approach makes for a more integrated and effective whole—and it seems that others agree, hence the disproportionate success of programmes made on film.

All television, film and video, would benefit from regarding each programme as an entity rather than a translation of something else. This calls for a different relationship between the writer and the others making the programme; it does not reduce the need for good writing or mean that the writer is less important—I am not advocating the sort of treatment meted out to writers by Hollywood in the 1930s. What is called for is teams, preferably small, of equals collaborating, perhaps led by a producer or director, though not invariably. Because I used film as the starting point for this model I would not like anyone to think that I am entering the lists in the sterile debate about the superiority of film over video or vice versa. I see both as tools and think it as futile to suggest that one is superior to the other as to suggest that in painting the brush is superior to the palette-knife. It is simply a matter of choosing whichever is the best for the job.

I had high hopes of the Edinburgh session on 'Drama-Documentary'—a marriage of disciplines which has already produced some outstanding television. There were two papers, by Jerry Kuehl and Gus MacDonald, both of whom seemed apologetic rather than confident about what they clearly regarded as a 'bastard form'. Both also had an extremely restricted view of what constituted the legitimate goals of writers and directors of drama-documentaries.

Jerry Kuehl's paper is the more closely argued and deserves attention if only because at its root it contains a dangerous fallacy about the nature of truth and objectivity in factual programmes. Kuehl argues: 'The impulse behind every drama-documentary is a desire to show how real people behave in a particular situation, mediated by acceptance of the fact that because those people and situations were never filmed, their behaviour and their situation must be reproduced after the event . . . What the producer wants to show—how things really were—is something he or she can never show, given that the filmed record that would enable that to be done does not exist.'

My quarrel here is more fundamental than that this seems a very limited view of 'the impulse behind every drama-documentary'; it is that no producer can show 'how things really were', nor should he or she pretend to be able to do so. In the end all programme making, all shooting even, whether reconstruction or actuality, is interpretation. Kuehl somewhat qualifies his argument by saying that 'the producer's point of departure may be . . . giving the audience an *idea* of what those people and those episodes were like.' But this qualification does not go anything like far enough. The essential point, surely, is that like it or not the producer can only give an idea of what *he or she thought* the events were like or what *he or she thought were the most important features* of those people or episodes.

Kuehl quite rightly castigates those producers who pretend that their dramatic reconstruction is a presentation of something

called the objective truth. However, in pressing his healthy suspicion of the claims of some drama-documentary makers Kuehl seems to fall into the converse trap, as it were, and imply that footage and finished programmes made up of shots of actual people and events enjoy a purity that places them above such suspicions, whereas in practice they are just as subjective, though often in different ways. Kuehl's complaint against drama-documentary adds up to the fact that in their work in this genre artists ranging from Méliès through Humphrey Jennings to Peter Watkins give us as much an understanding of their own minds as of 'the events which are their subject', and he concludes by asking: 'Is that good enough? I wonder.' My reply would be the age-old one that this is all any piece of work involving individual creativity can be, and that what determines whether it will be a good piece of work is the quality of the imagination that shapes it, plus the skill with which it is made. What results is necessarily an interpretation of events or persons, real or imaginary. This applies with equal force to all forms of television, and the sooner we stop pretending to a bogus objectivity, even in the most heavily factual areas of television, the better for everyone who watches it, works in it or controls it.

Gus MacDonald's paper on drama-documentary limited itself to a review of the work of Granada Television in the genre. Drama-documentaries coming from Granada have tended to be what one might call 'austere'—flatly delivered enactments of trial transcripts, wordless illustrations by actors to fill out the action in *World in Action*. Not for Granada the bold imaginative strokes of Ken Russell, the passionate commitment and mixed media of Robert Vas' work, nor even the obviously involved compassion of Brian Gibson in *Joey*. No wonder Leslie Woodhead, making one of Granada's better drama-documentaries, *Three Days in Szczecin*, felt compelled to take the first five (or was it ten?) minutes of his programme telling us in six different ways that the events in the Polish shipyard strike were reconstructed from authenticated notes, even showing us one of the real life protagonists on the set with the actor playing his part, standing under the glare of the arc lights as the camera tracked past him—for all the world like an extended version of one of those milk ads done on the set of a James Bond movie. *Three Days in Szczecin* was, apart from its opening, a fine programme, but I am not surprised that, despite the well-intentioned austerity, Granada's earnest house style leads all too often not to simplicity but to melodrama—programmes that have the quality of a Pinewood interpretation of 1984.

The discussion at Edinburgh on Drama-Documentary seemed to prove Dennis Potter's claim that among television people all arguments about the medium 'perpetually make the shift from "content" to "technique", "purpose" to "appearance", "meaning" to "style".' The platform panel consisted of a group of extremely able programme makers, yet all they could offer were anecdotes about departmental feuds and the technicalities of casting. It is my impression that during the decade I have been in television programme makers have become progressively less articulate, less able to argue constructively about their intentions, less ready to question the underlying purposes



'Three Days in Szczecin': Granada's drama/documentary about a shipyard strike in Poland

of what they are doing. A decade or so ago, those who made programmes still saw themselves not so much as television makers as practitioners of other disciplines from which they had come to work in television. Each of these disciplines—the theatre, documentary film, literature, etc.—had a thorough critical tradition and well understood theory. Addressing themselves to making television programmes, they argued from the bases of their parent disciplines—this applied even to those who had come into television straight from university or training school. Over the years, however, programme makers have become increasingly cut off from their parent disciplines, isolated from the critical and theoretical foundations on which they could once build in their work. The intellectual bedrock needed for consistently good work in any medium simply has not developed in television. All that exists is a silt of professional practice, accumulated and laid down in the face of transmission and production schedules that have never allowed time for the development of any considered theory.

The time has come for me to make a more literal justification of my opening claim that television has become dangerously middle-aged. The charge of middle age is easy to substantiate. Television had its fortieth birthday in 1976; most of the people making the programmes are now nearer forty than twenty. Middle-age also manifests itself in familiar symptoms: caution—an increasing tendency to play safe in choice of programmes and a reliance on well-tried formulae; excess fat round the middle; an accumulation of bureaucrats; middle-aged mentality, even among those who make the programmes. (The best, or rather worst, example of this for me was a pair of open discussion evenings arranged by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts on the future of film and television, which the television people spent by discussing not the issues confronting their medium but the pros and cons of pensions for freelancers.)

Finally the screenings at Edinburgh demonstrated that programmes of ten years ago were more confident, direct, virile than their more ponderous counterparts today. Those youthful programme makers felt no need to apologise when they broke the conventions of their day. A prime example, among many on show at Edinburgh, was *Some Women*, made by Tony Parker and Roy Battersby in 1969. It was a drama-documentary in which actresses re-created interviews done by Tony Parker with necessarily anonymous women criminals. They did not feel constrained to spend ten minutes apologising for what they were doing; they explained succinctly and got on with it. Despite limitations of equipment, they felt no need for fancy lighting or elaborate set-ups—perhaps they had neither the time nor the budget, nor were they suffocated by the doubtful benefits of being a 'prestige production'. Today, as then, it is in the contracting middle area of television that one must look for the advances, not to the big budget, risk-conscious, prestige and co-production-ridden end, nor to the money-starved end where there is not enough finance to back up promising experiment even when it escapes the crushing stare of timid management.

So to the charge of immaturity. I see television trying to do all the things that it did ten and more years ago, but more cautiously, more ponderously. A medium only makes itself foolish if it tries to enjoy perpetual youth. When it finds itself getting short-winded and flabby it must turn to the disciplines and rewards of maturity.

Much of the excitement of television in the 60s was the sense of pioneering—being the first to do a documentary about an actual strike, the first play about abortion, the first serial that tackled racism or the first series that showed the police 'as they really are'. Given youthful enthusiasm and support from above, this sort of thing was not too difficult (there were and still are plenty of good programme makers around). Today, however, there are very few 'firsts' left un-

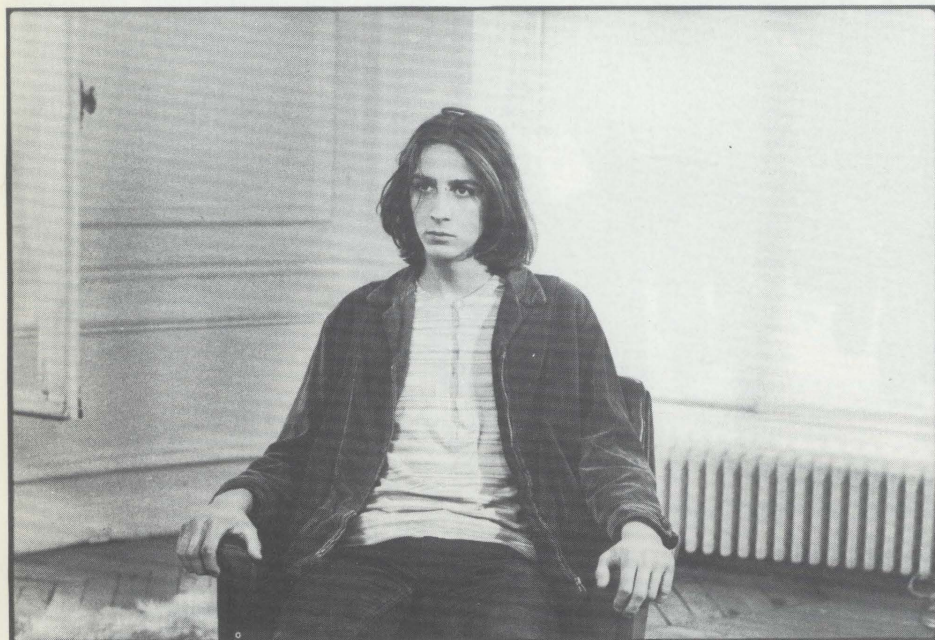
done—and in any case there is not likely to be much 'support from above' for the most worthwhile ones. So we have to turn inward, re-examine the ground television has already mapped, build on that. This is difficult and calls for a much greater degree of questioning, clarity of intention, intellectual thoroughness. So far we have not really faced up to the responsibilities of working in a medium which is no longer young. We have evaded the difficulties by, as Dennis Potter says, concentrating on form and technique to the exclusion of the larger questions of purpose. Until we answer Potter's charge we, and our medium, will remain immature.

In the past those who have written or argued publicly about television have either been people on the outside or, when they were programme makers—Anthony Smith, Nicholas Garnham, Stuart Hood, John McGrath (Dennis Potter is the exception who proves the rule)—they left television as soon as they started to say anything interesting about it. This is not true of films, theatre or literature, and will I hope cease to be true of television. We need people in television to find their voices and engage in argument. Only in that way can the medium develop living intellectual roots.

If I have seemed unduly hard on television I do not mean to be so. The Edinburgh Television Festival was founded out of a sense that television deserved the same prestige as the cinema. Whatever the prestige (about which I care little) of British television, its achievement is already far greater than that of the British cinema during its entire history. Despite programme makers who still persist in gravitating towards the cinema, perhaps because of prestige or the increasingly erroneous sense that film is more permanent than television, I am in no doubt that for anyone who is concerned about what goes on in this country and who wants to work in it, television is even now an incomparably freer and more serious medium than the cinema.

LE DIABLE, PROBABLEMENT

Tom Milne



Charles (Antoine Monnier) in the psychiatrist's office

Robert Bresson's film starts on a nocturnal riverbank in Paris. At first one can distinguish virtually nothing in the darkness. A few distant lights, maybe, their faint reflections suggesting the presence of water. Then suddenly, gliding slow and stately out from behind the unsuspected bridge that makes the night so peculiarly impenetrable, a *bateau-mouche* appears and traverses the screen, silent and mysterious, only to vanish again as the opposing arch swallows it from view.

For a moment, only the faint lapping of water is heard; and in that moment of absolute, tranquil desolation, one can hardly believe that the sun will ever rise or the city ever wake again. It is as though the ghostly boat, floating serenely through the Stygian night like Charon's bark and removing the last vestiges of life from the face of the earth, heralded a return to the chaos that reigned before the Creation: 'And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.'

Immediately following this overture, a newspaper headline about a young man found 'suicided' in the Père Lachaise cemetery; a title, 'Six Months Earlier'; and as the first step in solving this human mystery, a close-up of a human foot as a young dropout lectures his friends on the art of walking to ensure even wear and tear on shoes. Even more than in *Mouchette*, Bresson is concerned here with the system of defences with which modern man shores up the form he has contrived to give to the void: on the one hand, the array of ideologies with which he ensures his spiritual well-being, and on the other, the battery of alarms and devices with which he protects his physical safety.

At the very end of the film, however, after the film-length flashback explaining how the young suicide came to have one bullet in his back and another in the back of his head, it is again night. And in the cemetery, in a movement paralleling that of the mysterious *bateau-mouche*—as though he and his burden of human responsibility were the cargo it bore away to oblivion—the assassin strolling

casually away suddenly picks up his heels and disappears into the obscurity. Between these two points of darkness that might be one, Bresson celebrates what Franju once described as 'a ceremonial of death'. The death of a man, certainly. Of God, probably. Of the world . . . maybe.



'What impelled me to make this film is the mess we have made of everything. This mass civilisation in which the individual will soon no longer exist. This demented tampering with things. This immense demolition job in which we shall kill ourselves by trying to go on living. This incredible indifference shown by people, except for some of today's youth who see things more clearly.'

Given the simplicity, indeed almost the naiveté of Bresson's statement of intentions concerning *Le Diable, probablement*, some critics seem to have been encouraged to adopt the easy way out of dismissing it as just another ecological tract. There is that side to the film, of course. The documentary

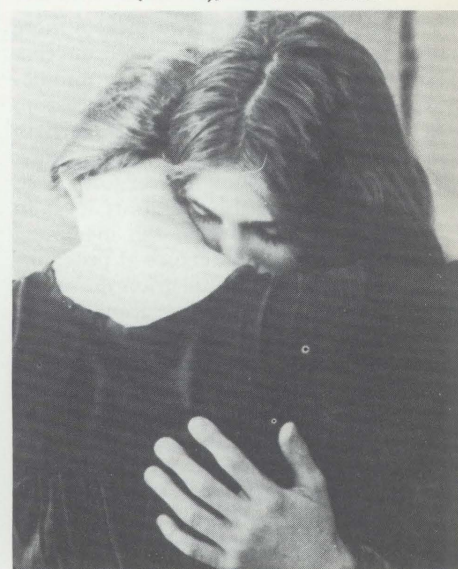
shots of the baby seal lolling appealingly in the snow, then being clubbed to death to provide an undamaged pelt for the fur trade, are as heartrending as ever. So are the appalling images testifying to the long-range effects of mercury poisoning in the Japanese fishing community of Minamata. Under the eye of Bresson's camera, as the sounds of electric saw and of tortured wood mingle in a cry of pain while huge trunks topple in helpless majesty, the felling of a tree reverberates like the doom of some tragic hero. Excitedly gathering round a lone fisherman dozing in the sun as his marker begins to bob in the polluted water of a river, casual on-lookers become celebrants at a modern mystery where an awed, anonymous voice starts the litany: 'He caught a *live* fish.'

Yet it is evident that for Bresson the ecological message conveyed by such images, familiar or otherwise, is self-evident. Far from preaching to the converted, he is concerned less with the impact of these images and intimations of disaster than with the implications apparent in the ways people respond to that impact. Time was, in Bresson's world, when the tormented soul of the young curé of Ambricourt, even though assailed on all sides by an irredeemably sinful society, could look out from within himself, see that it was good, and contentedly murmur 'All is Grace'. Is this still possible in this most modern of all possible worlds?

The title of *Le Diable, probablement*, implying (hypothetically, at least) some sort of malevolent supernatural force at work, derives from a line of dialogue in the most materially appointed sequence in the film. Boarding a bus with his friend Michel, after attending a lecture in which the latter's active concern about safety measures in nuclear waste disposal runs up against the passive wall of the lecturer's bland reassurances, the would-be suicide Charles (Antoine Monnier) listens neutrally as Michel (Henri de Maublanc) continues fulminating against the government for shirking its responsibilities. 'Don't blame the government,' someone sitting in front intervenes. And the general argument that ensues ends with one passenger angrily asking 'Who made this mockery of humanity?' and another replying 'The devil, probably.'

Meanwhile the camera, unconcerned with the identity of the speakers (their remarks

Tina Irissari (Alberte), Antoine Monnier



betray ideological attitudes, not individual responses), isolates in a series of close-ups the mechanical appurtenances of the bus—illuminated request stop indicator, automatic door manipulator, ticket-vending machine, gear-levers—as the driver watching intently in his rear-view mirror puts the bus and passengers through their well-regulated paces. Then, just as the title line is heard with its implied alibi of diabolic intervention, the driver looks momentarily over his shoulder, his interest caught: there is the unmistakable sound of a crash off-screen, the bus jerks to a halt, and the driver sheepishly climbs out to investigate. The finger on the button, in other words, is an individual's, each individual's, and not the anonymous extension of some anonymous chain of command.

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It is certainly no accident that, in Antoine Monnier, Bresson has cast a sort of blank page at the centre of his film: an ordinary, average, almost uninteresting face in which one can read absolutely nothing. All the deep reservoirs of sensitivity and the manifest signs of spiritual torment one has come to expect of a Bresson protagonist (and found even in the mutinous, sulky Mouchette) are reserved here for Charles' friends: the eminently Dostoevskian Henri de Maublanc as Michel, who is the author of a book about ways and means of avoiding humanity's rush to judgment, and is busily collecting evidence as part of his campaign to convince the experts that they are wrong; Tina Irissari as Alberte, another *femme douce* who helps Michel in his researches because she loves him, but is willing to sacrifice that love (and cause) in an attempt to console Charles because she cannot bear to abandon him to his darkness; Laetitia Carcano as Edwige, an activist Mary Magdalene also anxious to bathe Charles' feet with her tears.

In an excoriating little précis of humanity's *danse macabre* around the grave it has dug for itself and now wants to fill in, Charles obediently plays the game of emotional and intellectual demands in the wake of his concerned friends. 'I advocate destruction!' declares the speaker at an activist meeting; but destruction of what, to be replaced by what?—ah well, that nobody knows, but at least a point will have been made and someone will have noticed. In a deserted church, while the organ is tuned, a vacuum-cleaner plays, and anti-clerical protesters make the pathetic gesture of inserting pornographic pictures into the religious publications displayed for sale, a young priest in mufti (representative of the new, with-it Church) splits theological hairs with a group of students as to whether Christianity should keep up with the times or the times keep up with Christianity. At a discussion on the mathematical probabilities of accidental radium poisoning, challenged as to what will happen if safety precautions prove to be inadequate in nuclear waste disposal, the lecturer simply replies that other measures, in that case, will be taken.

'So that leaves science as our saviour,' Charles comments ironically. One can of course argue that Bresson's characteristically abridged survey of the world of protest is both elliptical and unfair. But the point is that in casting a cruel, almost Kafkaesque eye on the hands enthusiastically battering at the



Antoine Monnier, Nicolas Deguy in the church

corridors of power that wend labyrinthinely to a ubiquitous no exit, he does squarely face the essential paradox of the modern dilemma. To survive, you may well have to point the way by blowing up a nuclear reactor station; but if you blow up a nuclear reactor station, how do you survive?

The progressive darkening of Bresson's vision, apparent from *Mouchette* through to the near-nihilism of *Lancelot du Lac*, here comes to its logical conclusion in the line scribbled in Charles' notebook: 'When should I kill myself, if not now?' His problem, he tells the psychiatrist entrusted with the task of talking him out of his determination to kill himself, is not that he is sick: 'My sickness is that I see clearly.' And what he sees is that, in this mass civilisation (to use Bresson's words) in which the individual will soon no longer exist, men and women of goodwill are still going through the hollow motions of tenderness and concern, achieving nothing but useless self-torment. With the world beyond the point of no return, concern is demonstrably neither here nor there. And when he logically places himself along with the world beyond that point of no return through his decision to withdraw from it by killing himself, he also places himself beyond the reach of tenderness.

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For the first time in Bresson's work, someone stands on the brink of the void, seeing nothing there or anywhere, and acknowledging—in direct contradiction to the curé of Ambricourt's declaration of faith—that Nothingness is Grace. Yet Charles is human; accepting the logical consequence of his position, he is still afraid of dying. 'But I don't want to die,' he angrily corrects the puzzled psychiatrist ferreting for the Freudian roots of his suicide mania, 'I hate life, but I also hate death. That's the terrible thing.'

Rather to the distress of his concerned friends, who nevertheless redouble their

concern, Charles tries desperately to reaffirm his last ties with life—physical in default of the spiritual—by plunging into a frenzied quest for the ecstasies of animal pleasure ('ça me raccroche à des émotions') in a series of sexual encounters. With Michel reluctantly putting his own love to one side, Alberte offers herself as a bulwark against despair, only to find that Edwige has done the same, and that Charles, rather than hurt either, has agreed to marry both of them. Even a casual pick-up who promptly throws Charles out on discovering that he has been dreamily exploring the possibilities of death by drowning in her bath, finds herself impelled to soften the blow by the gift of a half-eaten box of chocolates.

In this tissue of lies and gestures woven out of human relationships, in other words, concern may be present but emotion (in the sense intended by Charles) is not. And perhaps the bleakest moment in the film comes with a shot of Charles and Alberte in bed together, in a chill comedy of cross-purposes as she weeps under the illusion that her sacrifice has been in vain while he tonelessly assures her that he will never leave her. Even bleaker, on second thoughts, is the rider to this scene later on, when even concern is absolved from participation: telephoning the psychiatrist's office for news just as Charles confesses that he may never be able to bring himself to make the gesture of taking his own life, Michel, Alberte and Edwige happily cry 'Il est sauvé', and go about their own business with consciences absolved.

Tenderness, on the other hand, is strangely present in the relationship between Charles and Valentin (Nicolas Deguy), the addict whom he persuades, with the lure of money for drugs, to pull the trigger of his suicide gun. Relationship is perhaps the wrong word for the association here, since all the time

'Any resemblance between characters
in this film and any persons living
or dead is purely coincidental'
—a legend too small to read on most films

The Invasion of the 'Real' people

David Thomson

September 25, 1977, the start of another week for American television. On Sunday night, the ABC network cuts and stretches Robert Aldrich's *The Longest Yard* over 2½ hours. Its penitentiary football match is interrupted five times an hour with commercials; in nearly every break there is an exultant advertisement for the same network's Monday night offering: the New England Patriots against the Cleveland Browns in live coverage of a National Football League game—the pattern of which has frequent time-outs and delays for commercials. If you are somewhere other than acute wakefulness—and that is the steady trance necessary for participation with American TV—one set of bulging, helmeted uniforms looks like another. The preposterous collisions of Aldrich's game continue with only slightly less aplomb in action-cam video. Sport on TV is a mythology, and in movie drama the resort to athletic conflict speaks for the hope that authenticity can guarantee interest and audience. We are used to the news taking on the rhetoric of drama, and movies are now rounding up every available 'real' person of appeal or notoriety as a basis for screenplay.

In the same week in America, TV offered feature-length movies about the parents of Karen Ann Quinlan, the dormant figure in a euthanasia controversy during the last two years; Caryl Chessman, and the twelve years he waited under a sentence of death; and *The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald*, an ingenious four-hour mutation of real events, staging the trial that Oswald might have faced but for Jack Ruby's intervention. That 'unrehearsed' murder spilled out 'live' all over America in 1963. It so tangled credulity and disbelief that some viewers phoned in to enquire if they had seen a 'story' that had broken down, albeit a story tamely told, since real killings are seldom as coherent or convincing as the fulsome disruption of bodies Sam Peckinpah engineers.

There is a fallacy that American TV is only drab, vulgar and obvious. It also plays the most pernicious game of Chinese boxes with its viewers. On the Monday after *The Longest Yard*, a breakfast talk show had the

real Mr and Mrs Quinlan as guests. Their ordeal has been shared with the American public for some time, and it was disconcerting to find them looking decent, ordinary and subdued—far from Brian Keith and Piper Laurie who played them in the TV film, Disney's *Dad and Carrie*'s mother, can we forget? Yet the Quinlans, when pressed, agreed that the professionals had done an irreproachable job. For a moment, Mrs Quinlan looked proud to have come so close to stardom.

I am not sneering at the mother of a comatose daughter, but I cannot watch more of these moments without the thought that real people are getting awfully cute. The title to this article is meant to echo the warning in Siegel's *Body Snatchers*, that the look and stamp of life could make us forget the need for liveliness. More than any other movie genre, the biopic has been transformed to suit new attitudes to history and unstable schemes of reality. It is time we

appreciated some of its conditions, for it is the readiest provider of the disarming gift of reality, which turns without warning into an impediment. It must be said—in a film magazine—that this brand of deceit could be a consequence of eighty years of film culture. Looking at people from the safety of the dark may not be the most responsible way of dealing with them.

The biopic was always a tidy genre in its heyday. No one regarded the pictures made in the 30s and 40s as anything other than success parables, touched by the aura of historical sanctity. They gave great scope to art directors and costume designers. Similarly, the BBC's doting on the period 1870–1920 (*Forsythia*) may be the manifestation of a well stocked design department rather than any creative or editorial attachment to those years. Hollywood biopics made a becalmed world of the past, and the factory system turned Casablanca, Macao, Shanghai and all faraway places into garden suburbs of Los Angeles. People spoke American in the past and were subject to the fictional travails popular with very settled people. History book clubs and biopics both appeal to those whose anxiety about the present is allayed by backing into the future and regarding history as a gentle, downward slope that leads sweetly to the present. History in that view is the explanation of stability.

Its bland romanticism is offset by the heroic qualities of genius, determination and dullness that allegedly activated Great Men of the Past. The biopic is the movie genre that showcases benevolent success without analysing the values or the means that secure prominence in the real world, and without threatening the small-town context in which

the American audience was encouraged to regard itself. Paul Muni's lofty presentation of Zola or Pasteur consists of confrontations with humbug and stupidity in the outside world, a diligent, nourishing and fond household, and montage spasms of inspiration, labour and fame. It is oddly like the gangster film—say, *Public Enemy*—except that energy is provoked by its humdrum setting in crime films. 'Made it, ma—top of the world!', from *White Heat*, could come from a brash biopic. But usually the characters are level, decent and unmarred by the obsessiveness of real artists, scientists or statesmen.

The personality of the great man is swamped by the glamour of star personalities who have condescended to lend their lustre to dowdier figures. This obscures or makes irrelevant the work these men did. Words, the power of fiction and the radical nature of realism are all sacrificed in *The Life of Emile Zola* to Paul Muni's humourless masquerade as a wise old general practitioner who illuminates and corrects social wrongs, notably the unfortunate victimisation of Dreyfus. He is a polite bearer of the label writer: household and community can respect him without ever having to read him. Similarly, Edward G. Robinson's Ehrlich or Greer Garson's Madame Curie are obedient proof of dedication winning through all adversity, humble geniuses with glib descriptions for the impenetrable work they do—like grant aid appeals for abstruse projects carried on by scientists too intense to be allowed in front of a foundation committee. Their screen characters are made up in the ways common in fictional dramas: personality is preferred to substance, and no great man is ever allowed to be awkward, abrupt or prickly. Reticence or eccentricity become displays of owlish character acting. Glenn Miller is as amiable, hesitant and dogged as James Stewart, and Lincoln as dry, gaunt and holy as Henry Fonda.

No wonder we were ill-prepared for musicians like Jagger or for Nixon as president. Yet the biopic surely established a popular attitude to fame that helped inspire and form the latter—a man with the shiftiness of Fred MacMurray in *Double Indemnity* but trying to appropriate Edward G. Robinson's solidity in the same film. There is more than a suggestion in the careers of Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald and Mailer that they saw the American Writer as having to compete for attention with stars from other constellations. While Ronald Reagan personifies the confusing influence of media imagery on politics. This was initiated by Roosevelt, whose example of achievement despite handicap encouraged the unequivocal search for fame in the classical Hollywood biopic.

In the 50s, the biopic turned ugly, sceptical or depressed in the movies. Jose Ferrer's *The Great Man* is sour with irony—as if *Citizen Kane*'s diagnosis of corrupting applause was at last being appreciated. *The Glenn Miller Story* may be the last of the comfortable pre-war tributes to 'making it', though it is really a weepie rooted in our knowledge that Glenn will not land safely, even if 'Little Brown Jug' still lulls the world and embalms June Allyson's widow in tears. There is no safer place for the great man than dead and revered. Vincente Minnelli's *Lust for Life*, perhaps the most moving fiction about an artist, is actually a



Pools winner Vivian Nicholson (left) with Susan Littler, who played her in 'Spend, Spend, Spend', Jack Rosenthal's BBC adaptation of her autobiography

study in desperation and frenzy only calmed by death and the final Cinemascope gallery of Vincent's paintings. But Kirk Douglas' Van Gogh does not cheat: he is more unhappy and 'impossible' than he or anyone else can endure. Greatness in *Lust for Life* is an alien and disturbing force in an indifferent world; and achievement is something only posterity will discern. Even then, it imposes a sweepingly optimistic title on what is really a quest for release. Greatness in Minnelli's film and Douglas' performance is a corrosive disease; the work absolves the distress, but only after the artist has killed himself.

At the same time, television in the 50s was providing more and more real-life achievers. Not much of this was in screen-time clearly labelled as documentary. The widening

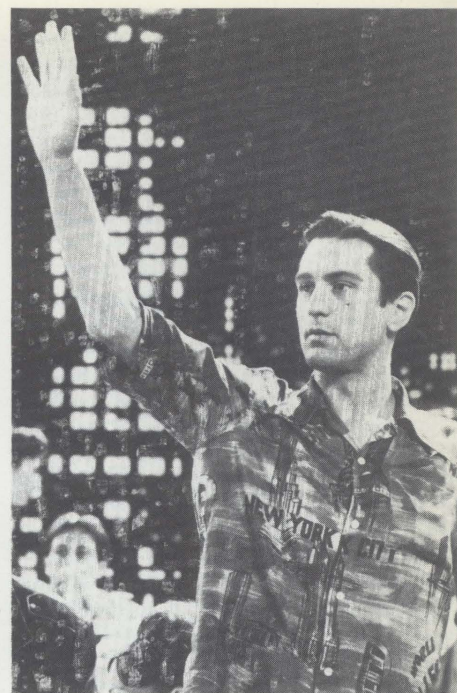
reach of news broadcasting made politicians so familiar on the box that, at one jittery moment in his career, Richard Nixon went over the heads of Congress and journalists straight at the domestic, recumbent public with the tale of a puppy. Under the banner of thorough investigation, question and answer, politicians and leading figures in public life had opportunities to display and promote themselves. That the public saw these interviews as chances to share in the aura of success is indicated by the present condition of American talk shows. These are orgies of self-congratulation and fawning; their talk is seldom more than cooing flattery and shameless promotion of what 'we' are doing. They have a rhythm of introduction, prolonged applause, remarks and rapture. The hosts—Johnny Carson, Dinah Shore, Merv Griffin, Mike Douglas—are honeyed officials

'Genius, determination and dullness . . .' Walter Pidgeon and Greer Garson in 'Madame Curie'





Left: Ilie Nastase on court. Right: Robert De Niro in 'New York, New York'



in a ceremony that cherishes success and celebrity. But there are not enough genuine celebrities for the shows, so it manufactures them. The rhythm is the same and as hustling with alleged high-fliers: charisma, as Leni Riefenstahl discovered, can attend the most unlikely specimens.

In other words, the American success story has become an addictive staple, hardly departing in mood from the ads that regulate the applause shows and which sometimes feature the lauded ones, no less homely or radiant, advertising traveller's cheques or a breath deodorant. It is tasteless, hollow success dependent on unquestioning gloss and hype. The audience long ago adopted spectacles that screened out imperfection and rendered a heady, wondrous eminence. It is a slot or atmosphere now waiting to be filled, with awful temptations for unscrupulous operators, whether comics or mad prophets of the air.

There are other successes, less sanitised and more honourable. These are the sportsmen who do so much to occupy and dignify American television. For the best part of three years, I have followed the Boston Red Sox on the small screen; three-quarters of their 160 games in a season are televised in the vicinity of Boston. Through thick and thin, I have been drawn to Carl Yastrzemski, the captain of the Red Sox. He is a veteran whose ability keeps him at the top of a game so competitive there is no pity for passengers. A left-handed hitter, he stands still, his bat raised vertically and free from the agitated flexing of younger sluggers. He puts together eye, nerve, judgment and power to stay high in the national averages; invariably he triumphs in crises. In the outfield he made not one error in the season just ended, and held catches that looked implausible even in slow-motion replay.

A baseball game lasts three hours, more or less, and I have probably watched him for some 200 hours during the period March to October—about as long as the entire screen work of James Cagney. Yaz seems a quiet man, a Hawksian professional flinching

from temperament. He is laconic, able and consistent, a role for Clint Eastwood, except that Yaz already has the part off to perfection.

Not every sportsman has responded to this massive stardom as easily. The single combat and exposed heights of prize money in tennis have aggravated the neurosis of Nastase, who seems torn between the dread of being watched and the fear that he may be ignored. For Nastase, tennis is either the chance of total, matchless absorption or the increasing likelihood of halting and destroying the game altogether. He is the Robert De Niro of the courts, no longer ready to abide by the word of an umpire, yet scarcely aware that tennis is not possible without some possibly stupid master to whom the players owe blind allegiance. Nastase sees mistakes. That leaves him an agnostic, but as fretful as anyone who has fallen from the serene grace shared by players who heed the Call. One day, we feel, he will disintegrate at the net, like the tattered existentialist he has become. He can be as droll as Bogart, but he is the first protagonist of tennis noir, hovering between perfect motion and betrayal.

Is it fanciful to speak of Nastase as if he were the product of RKO? Or is it the proper response to someone most of us have only seen—yet seen often—as a figure in moving images, the centre of action on a screen? Of course, we 'know' Nastase is a real person, just as our eyes tell us in Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* that Farley Granger is not involved in the long shots of the tennis match. But surely we take sides for or against Nastase, identifying with him, imagining that we are him? Whether flirting with a lady line judge or locked in conflict with Stan Smith, he is a vessel for fiction, a lively image that imagination occupies and explains.

Hence the epic cultural achievement of Muhammad Ali, a man who has played himself for fifteen years without any of the disasters of identity predicted for him by rivals or doctors. His 'dementia' may have saved boxing from an inertia that seems

certain as soon as he retires, and 'the Greatest' has regularly mocked boxing, whether exaggerating fierceness to the point of absurdity or simply leaning on the ropes and declining to take part in a round. Once, that would have been called 'No Contest', but Ali has usurped the referee by redefining the rules. I don't think it is his prowess, wit or charm—all limited—that have captivated us so much as the way he has conjured with our wish to see him as a crazy character, a performed part, a fictional being—the screwball noble savage. Thus the change of name, the grotesque poetry and the mockery of modesty that long ago anticipated a movie released while he was still champ, *The Greatest*, with Ali taking on Ali, since no one else can give him a worthwhile contest.* He is a William Wilson who has rope-a-doped the *doppelgänger* myth into surreal farce. *Body and Soul* the archetypal boxing movie was called, rough and strenuous with honesty; but Ali has thrown a wink at the camera—as dainty and stinging as his jab—with the certainty that it is all in the mind.

Ali's pioneering has been to abandon sincerity, and this is a development that has always haunted film's comprehensive authenticity. When so much of an image is lifelike, recorded and actual, when the photograph is itself an item of proof, identification and verification, then the person photographed can act or lie without losing actuality in the image. Ali kids so much that he can never regain sincerity. Like Jeanne Moreau in *Eve*, he knows we'll believe anything and adjusts accordingly. The flagrant claims of greatness diminish greatness as a quality. In the ring, he mimics pain and distress just as he dramatises the urge to hurt and win. With his insights, he must be cold, sceptical and joyless. But after years of fighting he remains magically pretty, like Gina Lollobrigida after she has been stoned at the end of King Vidor's *Solomon and Sheba*.

*Another way of overcoming the admirable Ken Norton—strong, conventional fighter (who would be champ by the old scoring) and 1930s type actor in *Mandingo* and *Drum*.

I daresay Ali has been filmed as much as anyone else alive in the last fifteen years, and his escape from sincerity is closely connected with the knowledge that he is being photographed. It has been a convention of the fiction movie that a character will brood, meditate or reflect privately without giving any hint that a camera, fifty technicians and thousands of watts are peering into his introspection. That intimate, 'revealing' look on the actor's face is a fraudulent sincerity, the collision between realism and bogusness on the screen. There are, to be sure, movies that try to dispel the specious aura of frankness—movies as diverse as Robert Bresson's and Yvonne Rainer's. But surely TV, or the motley years of picturing of an Ali, has gone much further in eating the soul with doubt. Ali's extended confidence trick is the most sardonic commentary on the make-believe involved in pretending, say, that Bogey was Rick. *Casablanca*, in a truth rarely conceded, is a documentary about certain employees of Warner Brothers in the early 40s carrying on as if they were characters caught up in wartime intrigue and romance. But that *Casablanca* was a neighbourhood of LA, a location of mood like Polanski's *Chinatown*. The French and German officers speak American, and Bergman kissed Bogart without exchanging more than a few words with him. Flimsy letters of transit are honoured by the Gestapo so that the story may function.

Television has taught us that reinterpretation more cogently than any critical complaint about the illusionistic confinement of Hollywood movies. The public can fluctuate between illusion and authenticity as easily as TV itself shuffles the forms and provides a switch that is a do-it-yourself editing machine. The effect on our stability and our sense of a reliable external reality has to be shuddered at. Along with the assiduous American climate of 'knowing and liking yourself' (not one without the other), whether through expert analysis or the

popularised glut of 'I'm OK' books and doctrines, pictures have helped make us observers of ourselves. The movies allowed the imagination to travel—in and out of stars, scenes and stories—and we are now our own frontier posts, where conscience turns a blind eye to persistent contraband.

In America, last year, a striking book was published describing the stresses of living in a family that was a focus for public adulation. The book was *Haywire* by Brooke Hayward, the daughter of Leland Hayward and Margaret Sullavan, leading agent and actress and, once upon a time, rapturous version of the idyllic union of beautiful people. It is a touching account of bliss turning sour. The three children of the marriage lived when young in a haven of plenty and grace. They were rich and spoiled—perhaps more than even Brooke Hayward realises—which makes the spoiling especially poignant. But they also existed in a romance. Their mother was a star and a woman of hallowed emotional purity on screen, tempted to transport scenarios into their domestic life. The father was handsome, brilliant but always working—away, on the phone, and walking the tight wires of big deals, a puppet master of other creative people. The marriage ended in divorce, and *Haywire* is still troubled that no one involved understood why. The reader guesses something the author cannot quite see: that the family's happiness was too near the movies' hot-house joy to withstand real life and unscripted antagonisms. In time, one daughter killed herself, the son was in and out of mental institutions, Brooke herself had an unhappy marriage—to actor Dennis Hopper—while Margaret Sullavan, the actress who manifests a lyrical love of life and feelings, died suddenly, perhaps by her own hand.

I don't know a better book on the difficulty stars have in finding and keeping a private life not dazzled by their screen selves. Yet even now a TV series is being based on *Haywire*. Of course, there is drama enough

in the book. But there are members of the family living. Can they be helped by more fictionalising of their real circumstances? The celebrity-hunter in us looks forward to the series, but how closely can we follow such incestuous mingling of forms without pausing? Who can play Margaret Sullavan in such a series? Diane Keaton, who looks amazingly like her? Or Brooke Hayward, a beautiful woman, a model and an actress, and presumably the holder of some rights in the matter?

Two conclusions emerge. We are getting an increasing amount of material on screens of all sizes in which the boundaries of feature and documentary are being disregarded; and in most cases some people consent to this uneasy portrayal of themselves. Inevitably, this prompts all of us to regard our lives as potential for fiction, or as the material for some clearer and more emphatic form. Surely it is part of the process persuading us to lose untidy idiosyncrasy in return for the gilded vacuity of the ideal consumers in ads. But consumers are so much victims of consumption that they have no experience. Their opting for style has cut them off from anything other than stereotype scenario.

The development is alarming because it takes so many intriguing directions, most of which end in a maze as beguiling as a Borges labyrinth. Some TV biopics are merely very dull movies, filled with the morbidity that allows us a sentimental agony for anyone who 'really' died—as if anyone did not. But the 'trial' of Lee Harvey Oswald was a prime-time 4-hour assessment of the defects of the Warren Report. Moreover, this compromised way of watching or responding to life has to its credit *Chronique d'un Été*, *Grey Gardens*, *Gimme Shelter*, Fred Wiseman, the BBC's folding of Katherine Mansfield's stories into her life, and Norman Mailer's *Marilyn*, works in which we appreciate the dance of figure and shadow. But the wit, discretion and awareness of form required to

Left: Lillian Hellman en route to Hollywood in 1935. Right: Jane Fonda as Lillian Hellman in 'Julia'



trace that intricate intertwining are very rare, while the attempt is commonplace and slick.

The sharpest warning I have seen comes in Fred Zinnemann's new film *Julia*, in which Jane Fonda plays or represents Lillian Hellman. Zinnemann's contribution to the film is meagre and decorous. He supplies a visual travelogue in time and space and vogueish glimpses of the writer at home on Cape Cod. The movie is dominated by its female personalities: Fonda, Vanessa Redgrave, as the elusive martyr Julia, and Lillian Hellman, character in the film and author of the original 30-page 'portrait', which is included in her book *Pentimento*.

The subject of the original is too slight and too grave for a movie, and the finished film seems heavy and coarse in comparison. It is about Hellman herself, and its central action is set in the 30s. Preparing to visit Moscow, she receives a message from her beloved childhood friend, Julia, asking if she will stop off en route in Berlin with \$50,000 of Julia's own money which the underground can use to buy the freedom of Jews and political prisoners.

Lillian agrees to take this risk; book and film alike focus on her courage through ignorance of what Julia must have undergone as an opponent of the Nazi regime. After a tense but conventionally thrilling train journey, Lillian is briefly reunited with Julia in a Berlin café. She hands over the money and goes to Moscow. A year later (in the book) she learns that Julia has been killed by the Germans and collects her battered corpse from a London undertaker. Such is cinema's need to tighten and link that in the movie Lillian dozes off during a Moscow performance of *Hamlet*, dreams a brutal death for Julia and awakes to hear the news of her real death. This invention is sustained by another—a man who watches Lillian on the train and follows her to the meeting with Julia—so that the death of a friend may be attributed to Lillian's action. Nowhere in the written original is this direct cause for guilt mentioned.

The portrait in *Pentimento* is like much of Miss Hellman's post-theatrical writing—very dramatic, even if it is presented as reportage. There are vivid glimpses of a friendship lasting from childhood and adolescence into separated adulthood. The writing veers between acute detail and considerable vagueness. Much is left out that the reader might want to know. We must take for granted a style that is brimming but off-hand, as if there was a feeling too strong to be told. At the very least it requires Hemingway's terseness to sustain its various lacunae and tight-lipped severity. I admire the portrait, but I have always been as uncertain about how to react to it as I am with, say, *Green Hills of Africa*, *Armies of the Night* or *Speak Memory*, books in which a wondrous trick has made the haphazard into a pattern.

My discomfort watching *Julia* was in wondering whether I was meant to value a movie character (embodied by Jane Fonda) or the rugged and very lively Lillian Hellman as a heroine of liberal grace under pressure. The film begins with a grey screen: there is a misty lake and sombre mountains, a rowboat and a figure sitting in it hunched over a fishing line and her recollections. It is meant to be Lillian Hellman, but the voice that begins

narrating is Jane Fonda's. She speaks the explanation of 'pentimento' from Hellman's book—original but altered shapes showing through a painting as it fades. I am not sure what this has to do with *Julia*, in which memory insists on being reliable and loyally maintained. Indeed, at the end of the film we come back to Lillian in her boat—as patient and as picturesque as a person in a Japanese watercolour—and Fonda's voice brings the story up-to-date, with grim mourning for both Dashiell Hammett and Julia: 'I am stubborn. I have not forgotten either of them.'

Hammett in the movie is a melancholy wisecracker who mooches around the house, reads Lillian's plays and comforts her after nightmares. He is also Jason Robards, doing every bit as good a job as he did on Ben Bradlee in *All the President's Men*, where his 30s movie editor sorted out the Watergate crisis. There is one scene between Hammett and Hellman that is especially difficult to digest, and which illustrates the precarious stance of 'real' people acted out in movies.

It comes after the great success of Lillian's play *The Children's Hour*. She is lolling in a sailboat that Hammett is steering on another enchanted lake. The profits of the play are taxing her: she longs for a sable coat, but then she remembers that she ought to donate the money to FDR instead.

Now, in a 30s movie, if that were Katharine Hepburn talking to Cary Grant in *The Philadelphia Story*, then the dilemma would be an amusing contortion of mixed impulses. But in *Julia* my laughter was smothered by knowing that Hellman is alive and perhaps still torn over such choices. In *Scoundrel Time*, for instance, a confident moral commentary on part of her own life and a recent American ordeal, she tells how, as she waited for her day in court with the House Un-American Activities Committee, she bought a beautiful and expensive Balmain dress: 'It will make me feel better to wear it.' That was in 1952. More than twenty years later, in America, Miss Hellman's craggy face grinned cheerfully above a rich fur coat she was advertising in magazines. Miss Lillian can come on as tough and lived-in as Thelma Ritter. But she has a streak as delicate as any woman contemplating fur, and when the two clash she is a complicated observer of scoundrels and courage.

Julia is reckless, misleading, and I think it undermines our notion of firmness in reality. Of course, real people always will live in and through their imaginations. Film's far-reaching juxtaposition of the lifelike and life itself means that it has always had to ravel and unravel the threads. But the invasion is now rampant, and in *Julia* it takes the pretty guise of Jane Fonda's harassed face claiming to be Lillian Hellman and wearing a fetching grey hat lined with the smuggled \$50,000. *Julia* would be easier to take, and more honest, if it ended with Hellman herself, as awkward or fluent as nature has made her. Real people must recognise their images and not travel under their disguise. But nature is no longer a respected inventor of persons, and thus art's duty—to invent people nearer truth than those who live can hope to come—is blurred. With that misty vision it is possible, but deadly, to think that a Redford and a Hoffman, with Robards in their corner, could safeguard our constitution. ■

Le Diable, Probablement

from page 17

Charles is devotedly administering the fix Valentin craves, and Valentin doggedly follows Charles to his appointed place of execution, they each become priests fulfilling some mysteriously preordained rite in pursuance of the ceremonial of death; and each administers to the other, not so much in charity as in blessed indifference, the *coup de grâce* that brings the desired oblivion.



But *Le Diable, probablement*, which was very nearly banned in France for under-18s as an 'incitement to suicide', would not be a Bresson film were its darkness not lightened somewhere by a ray of some kind, however obscure. Long gone, of course, are the days when Bresson's protagonists found salvation whether they sought it or not. Gone, too, the difficult acquisition of something else again, not to be labelled in theological terms, by Mouchette, Marie or Lancelot. Here, no doubt because the catalogue of vanishing species has become absolute, the animal world that increasingly cast its anxious eyes over the destructive fury of human follies in *Mouchette*, *Balthazar* and *Lancelot* is conspicuous by its absence. There remains, however, the inanimate world.

In a film where the characters are literally assaulted by a barrage of summonses, interdictions and appeals from traffic signals, lift signs and bus indicators, Bresson makes one unusually conscious of places, objects, artefacts. The barely worn sole of the shoe held to camera in the opening sequence; the bullet Charles contemplates as it lies quietly in his palm ('Before blowing it into his brains, maybe he wants to know what's going in there'); the tiny ripples, no bigger than might be caused by rain drops, as Charles frantically empties the gun into the placid river; the quais by the Seine, impartially offering an ambience redolent of peace or despair . . . All suggesting a quality of endurance or permanence that will outlive human frailty.

Diffuse and elusive in their intervention into human concerns (there is even a violent blast of protest, as a girl student taxes sacred music with a mediocrity incapable of inspiring knowledge of God, from one of the pipes in the organ being tuned), all these elements are brought together in the magnificently strange serenity of the scene where Charles and Valentin, armed with sleeping-bags, record-player and a recording of Monteverdi's *Ego dormio*, spend the night in a deserted church. A cathedral is a safe place, Charles reassures Valentin by quoting Victor Hugo's dictum, except when the priests are there. And in the image of Charles safely tucked into his sleeping-bag under the vaulted roofs, caressed by the Monteverdi lullaby, oblivious of Valentin rifling the poor-boxes, of the police entering to investigate the theft, of everything but his sense of being securely cradled for ever, one knows that he has found, however fleetingly and however undefinably, his own particular mode of salvation. What was he doing there anyway, the police ask when he is finally arrested and taken to the station for interrogation. 'You wouldn't believe me if I told you,' he says. ■

A major pleasure of the 1977 Edinburgh Film Festival was a limited retrospective of films, previously unseen in this country, by the American independent director Jon Jost: nine early shorts plus two of his three features, *Angel City* and *Last Chants for a Slow Dance* (*Deadend*). His first feature, *Speaking Directly* (1974), shown at Edinburgh in 1975 and more recently at The Other Cinema, has just been acquired by the BFI Distribution Library. The following article is based on my own viewings of the films and interviews with Jost carried out during his visit to Europe last September.

In the years before he made *Speaking Directly*, Jon Jost produced some twenty shorts, all essentially non-narrative and varying between five and thirty-five minutes in length. It is crucial to an understanding of

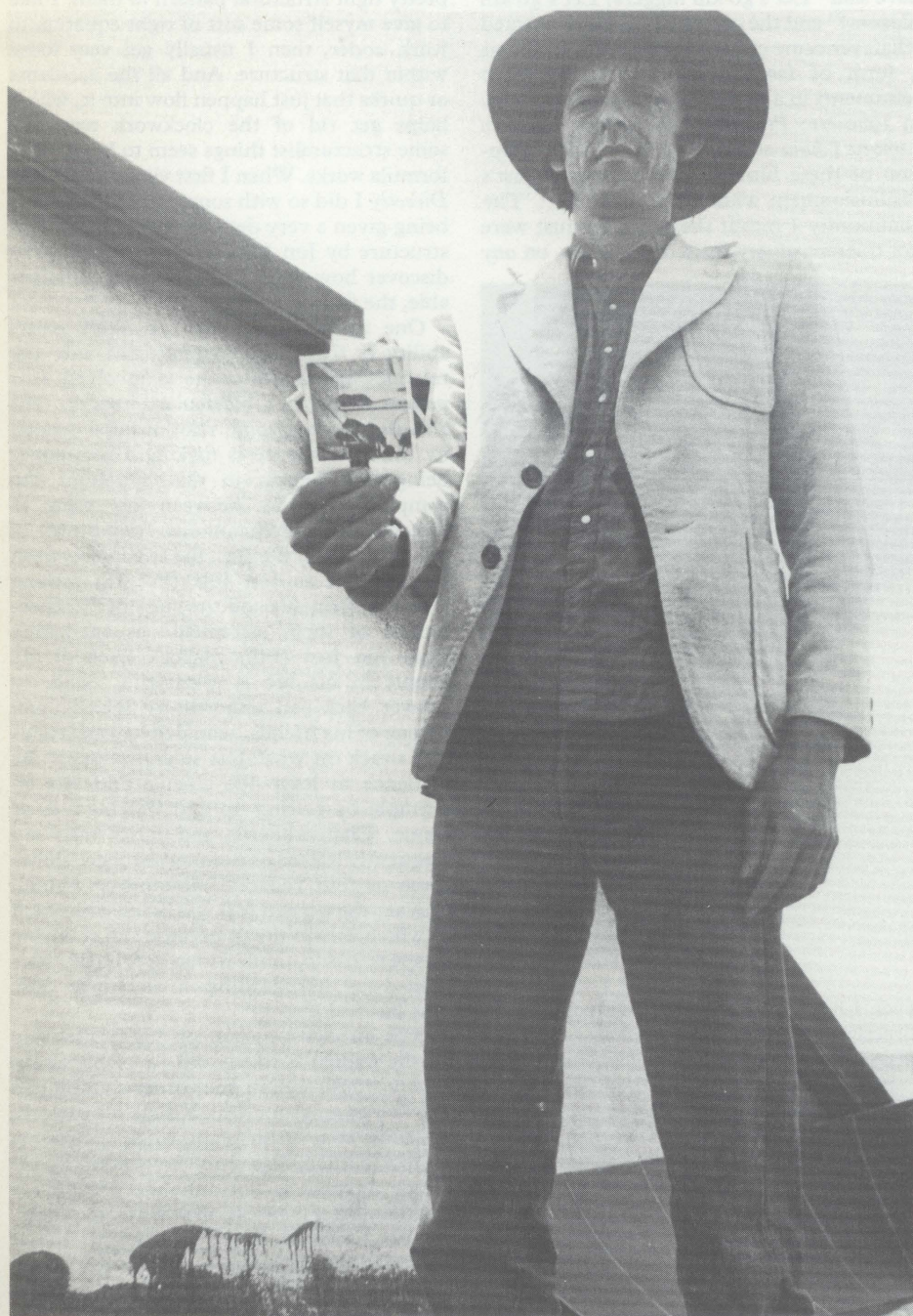
Jost's more recent work to realise how firmly rooted his later cinematic practice is in this range of early shorts. He has never worked within the commercial cinema, nor did he have the critical background which has pro-

vided many European directors with a theoretical base—indeed, he claims that he never went to see films at all before he decided to start making movies himself. He has thus been comparatively little influenced by received ideas, and has developed his style, techniques and attitudes towards film directly from his own experience to an extent that is impossible for most directors. Jost may truly be said to be an 'experimental' director, not in the sense of consciously trying to appear avant-garde, but in the more important sense that he is a director who continuously evaluates the methods he is using and actively searches for alternatives.

Two major watersheds can be discerned in his development. *Speaking Directly*, the major turning point in his career to date, is one; the other is marked by his imprisonment for draft evasion from 1965 to 1967. All the films made before this point were silent and black and white, usually portraits of people that he knew. In his earliest films, Jost experimented a great deal with the use of multiple exposure, but had adopted a more severe approach by autumn 1964, when he made *City*, an impressionistic study of Chicago which he claims reflected his depression at the knowledge that he was about to be sent to prison. But the film's undeniably sombre qualities probably have just as much to do with its structure, a strict alternation of single tracking shots with clusters of stills. 'I had cut out the multiple exposures and I was moving more and more towards static shots. And I was getting more concerned with things that are called mundane—cigarette butts in the ashtray.'

Though prison prevented Jost from shooting films it did not completely stop him working. 'I made flip-card movies, not ones that moved but I would draw pictures of features and then deal them out to myself. I got a lot of bad movies out of my system that way.' He also scripted *Traps*, a 22-minute film about a girl who is stated at the end of the film to have committed suicide, which was realised in December 1967. *Traps* was preceded by *Leah* (August 1967), a half-hour portrait of a young woman in which shots of her, with voice-over representing her thoughts, are alternated with titles giving lengthy quotations from Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes*. 'The novel is very lush and romantic; what she says is very hard-edged. By the end she's as romantic as the quotes are, because the end is very melancholic. I wanted to give disparate elements that the viewers would have to synthesise for themselves.' *Leah* represented Jost's first use of this technique, which is central to most of the films he has made since. It was also his first sound film, which brought further changes: 'As soon as I started making sound films my whole style just shifted to another quality, because I thought well, when there's talk, there's talk, so I put a big emphasis on that and started using static shots.'

In *Traps* Jost uses the intriguing distancing device of presenting the film as having been



'Angel City'. Photograph: Keren McIntyre

Allan T. Sutherland

American Independent: JON JOST

put together from films and tapes discovered by an anonymous editor, who has divided the film up into sections bearing such titles as 'Noesis' and 'Epexegetis'. 'I remember rummaging around in a dictionary because I wanted this hypothetical editor to be a hyper-intellectual. I didn't know what the hell those words meant in between . . . ' In effect, by personifying his own control over the film, Jost is not merely inviting his audience to question what is being presented to them, but actively provoking doubt in their minds.

Two sections of the film detail, respectively, the woman's personal environment and outside influences upon her. Much of the latter consists of material about Vietnam: news photos, frames of a comic strip, newsreel footage. For the next five years Vietnam was a constantly recurring theme in Jost's work; it comes to stand as a kind of shorthand both for all the issues neglected by Hollywood and for all the political realities disregarded or consciously avoided by individuals in their everyday lives. Thus at the start of *13 Fragments* and *3 Narratives* from

equanimity: 'I do endless things to try to disorient the viewer.'

In 1968 Jost helped set up the political film collective Newsreel, and was present at the demonstrations during the Democratic Convention in Chicago. 'There was this mass of people, surrounded by these military guys with bayonets and guns and tanks, and I was sitting there thinking "Any time they want to shift the equation here over to reality they could just mow us down." And the content of the politics was completely unreal: this mass group was chanting "Fuck LBJ! Fuck LBJ!", but I got the feeling that they could have said "Let's go kill niggers! Let's go kill niggers!" and the crowd would have chanted whatever came out of the megaphone. It was a form of fascism.' He embodied these sentiments in a trilogy of political films made in 1970-71: *Primaries*, *A Turning Point in Lunatic China* and *1, 2, 3, Four*. The reception of these films further increased Jost's disillusionment with the political left: 'The community I meant the series for just were not tolerant of any form of criticism, on any

things far away might just be a way of avoiding things that related more directly to me or to the people around me. So it's a very directly political film.'

Speaking Directly is divided into a series of sections, each dealing with a different set of relations: 'I/They', 'I/You', 'We' etc. This structure was originally planned to enable Jost to use some rolls of free film stock he had been given; having made a test roll, he decided to junk the stock but keep the structure. 'There's a certain irony to having a very rigid structure based on this stock that you're not using. But all my films have some pretty tight structural pattern to them. I like to give myself some sort of tight equation to work under, then I usually get very loose within that structure. And all the accidents or quirks that just happen flow into it, which helps get rid of the clockwork tendency some structuralist things seem to have.' The formula works. When I first viewed *Speaking Directly* I did so with some trepidation, after being given a very detailed description of its structure by Jon Jost; and was surprised to discover how accessible, and indeed enjoyable, the film actually is.

One major reason for the film's palatability is that Jost examines not only the relationships in which he is involved as a person living in a particular situation, but also the more specific relationships created by the fact that he is making a film about being that person in that situation: the complex interplay between his roles as director and as acquaintance/friend/lover of the people he is filming; the tension between his position as Jon Jost (Person) making certain statements and the audience's expectations of those statements as emanating from Jon Jost (Film-maker). Each of the people in his life is given the chance to answer back—an opportunity seized upon by one of his friends, who delivers an articulate attack on what Jost is doing, urges the audience to leave the cinema and sets an example by getting up and walking out of frame. Clapperboards and false starts are frequently left in; one telling sequence shows three or four separate attempts at filming Elayne, the woman Jost was living with, each of which breaks down because she is unable to speak freely, and which are finally succeeded by her reading a statement that Jost has written.

The strongest assault on his relationship to the audience shows only a blank screen with a stop-watch in one corner counting off the five minutes for which the shot runs. In practice, this scene tends to be confusing, simply because—as Jost now admits—the shot's purpose is not announced explicitly enough, but his intention was entirely valid. 'I was trying to invert the normal movie equation, where you go to have things filled in for you, and say no, you're just going to have to fill in these five minutes for yourself.' More successful is a basically simple shot using a zoom out from a mirror. It starts with a close-up of Jost's face, he walks off-screen, leaving a view of the woodland in which the shot is being filmed, reappears in the distance and walks towards a small black object which an acute observer might recognise as a film camera. Then, as Jost operates the zoom, this entire image shrinks towards the centre of the screen and is revealed as a reflection in a mirror surrounded by more 'real' scenery.



'Last Chants for a Slow Dance'

Life, Jost's next film, the young art student who is its subject turns off a television set which is showing pictures of Vietnam. When, at the end of the film, she turns the set on again, it is still showing the same images.

Jost considers *13 Fragments*, which was his first film in colour, the best of his shorts. '*13 Fragments* is the most elegant of the films before *Speaking Directly*. And it's very carefully plotted, yet on one level so simple—just twenty-five shots.' Jost's original intention had been to juxtapose his descriptions of the girl with her speaking about herself; finding that she didn't interview well, he wrote a script for her, which she reads voice-over, as if it were a first-person statement. But the script's content undermines this presentation: 'It's all false. Movies are all false. He wrote all these words, every one of them.' Jost reports that audiences are often angered by this section, because it forces them to re-evaluate earlier statements which they had liked when taken at face value. His reaction to this is one of

level. I had been very directly involved with directly political people, but I just felt tired of trying to explain what I was doing.'

Jost's disenchantment with radical politics led him to withdraw to living in the country, first in Oregon and then in the harsher environment of Montana. It was during this period that he made *Speaking Directly*, a remarkably honest, searching look at the whole network of involvements which formed his personal situation at the time—involvements ranging from the most specific and intimate (the woman he was living with) to the most general (his implicit involvement with Vietnam). 'At the time I didn't have any answer to all the contradictions I raised in the political series, so all I could do was go back into myself and try to sort out the paradoxes in my own life. I was trying to live out in the woods and not do this, not do that because I didn't want to participate, yet knowing that I was still involved whether I liked it or not. And then I started to feel that all this worrying about Vietnam and these

Even when one knows it's coming, the sequence causes a brief moment of complete disorientation that's like a perceptual kick in the guts.

The extent to which *Speaking Directly* represented a summation both of Jost's earlier work and of his personal and political preoccupations is indicated by the fact that it was followed by a three-year withdrawal from film-making. But Jost expresses satisfaction with the film: 'It was the first film where I was consciously trying to deal with audience responses. I think that shows in the film and it also shows in the audience response, which is usually a positive one.'

Jost came out of seclusion in 1976 to make *Angel City*, a sharp and funny film and my personal favourite of his works to date. Through the personality of private eye Frank Goya, Jost draws on a classic Hollywood genre while retaining the structuralist concerns of earlier work. As Goya tracks down the murderer of starlet Gloria Franklin, wife of Pierce Delrue who owns the Raxon Corporation, the largest company in the USA, the film probes into what appear to be larger political questions. But as the investigation progresses it becomes clear that the two levels are not as separate as they seemed: Delrue has had his wife bumped off because Raxon owed her a lot of money. '*Angel City*, while being a rather vituperative critique of capitalism and Hollywood and all that, is simultaneously a film with a narrative line. It pokes fun and simultaneously provides a serious critique of Los Angeles as a structural economic system.' Basically, it's a similar structure to *Speaking Directly*, in that it alternates between something relatively palatable to the audience—the detective story—and a cinematically abstract essay and documentary.

Goya himself is a notable addition to the canon of screen detectives. Talking direct to camera in a dry, ironic drawl, he bears a closer relation to the cynical, wisecracking side of Philip Marlowe than any screen version of Chandler's detective I've seen. Viewing *Angel City* for the third time recently, I was surprised to realise how little screen time Goya actually occupies; his presence is implicit throughout, perhaps because he operates from the start on a level slightly outside the narrative reality. Thus, in an early scene, talking about the puzzle of Gloria's murder, he starts removing the image in which he stands, leaving jigsaw-shaped patches of blank screen. Or at the end of the film, when Delrue's heavies catch up with him, he shrugs his shoulders, 'Okay, I'm out of the picture,' and vanishes from the screen, leaving them clutching at thin air.

Much of *Angel City* consists of long set-piece scenes. The introductory aerial shot of Los Angeles, sweeping down to the Hollywood sign, and a later freeway shot, both with a voice-over by Jost giving a list of statistics about the city: births, deaths, crimes, venereal diseases, number of motor cars, number of inhabitants. Gloria's screen test for the Hollywood remake of *Triumph of the Will* (a project which Jost claims to be sure Hollywood would undertake if they felt there was money in it). A sensuous close-up, full of phallic symbolism, of a pair of lips and a lipstick, with voice-over of an article from the *Los Angeles Times* describing a change in the marketing campaign for the

film *Lipstick* which will put a heavier stress on the rape and violence aspects of the film in order to increase its appeal to 'black and lower-income groups'. And a deliciously pointed parody of a promotional film, in which Pierce Delrue, in studiously informal dress, strolls along a beach giving a friendly chat about how a big complex world like ours needs big, complex multi-national companies.

With *Last Chants for a Slow Dance* (*Dead-end*), his most recent feature, Jost deliberately set himself the task of working within a predominantly realistic, narrative mode. 'I decided that if I wanted to raise money for production purposes I needed to be able to demonstrate that I could handle things like realistic acting. But at the same time I was trying out things like colour overlays—giving them their cake and me eating it. Because basically I don't believe in realism in that way, to me it's all theatre.'

The film, which Jost describes with a touch of irony as 'a slice of Americana', follows one man, Tom, through a series of everyday

sequences with little stress on temporal continuity. Both films also make use of music to aid transitions between major sequences but keep it structurally distinct from the action. (It should however be noted that the pattern is much more rigid in Jost's case: a strict alternation between long, mainly single-shot, sequences and Jost's own country songs, which act as 'a reflective comment' on events. Though it's less overt than in other films, Jost has retained the 'tight structural equation' within which he likes to work.) And like Wenders, Jost in realistic narrative mode is content to present his character as he stands, with little explication of past history and without any attempt at easy psychological explanations for his actions.

A further parallel is suggested by Jost's account of his approach to *Last Chants*: 'I was basically trying to deal in moods, or an overall ambience of the social environment that the character lives in and what he's like inside. Compared to *Angel City*, which is a very worked-out, intellectual movie with very specific intentions and very specific things done for specific purposes, *Last Chants*



'*Last Chants for a Slow Dance*'

scenes in the weeks leading up to his apparently motiveless murder of a man he's never met before. 'It was partly based on Gary Gilmore, not in any specific way but just showing a mentality that exists. And part of it came from my time in jail, where I met a lot of people who all had the same kind of brash, mindless self-centredness: "Oh, I'm just the free rambling individualist person that doesn't owe anybody anything," and you build up all these responsibilities and then just walk away from them whenever you don't like them. So I was trying to deal with a sexual type, cowboy macho, and then I wanted the dramatic punch of a killing.'

I find the film curiously reminiscent of Wim Wenders' work. I am not thinking here of the obvious parallel with the murder in *The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty* (which, coming near the beginning of the film, actually has a quite different significance) so much as similarities of structure and style. Like *Kings of the Road* in particular, *Last Chants* consists of a montage of separate

was the sort of film that's done mostly off the top of my head, done intuitively.' The latter comparison is intriguing, because the 'worked out, intellectual' *Angel City* has an anarchic splendour which has no place in *Last Chants*, while the 'intuitive' *Last Chants* is a film of extraordinary restraint and formal elegance—a paradox which provides an exceptionally telling indication of the nature of Jost's attitude to film.

Jon Jost will be returning to this country in April for a series of provincial screenings of his films organised by the Bristol Arts Centre, and hopes to make one or more films while he's over here. (For reasons that are both functional and ideological, Jost makes his films on very low budgets; his most expensive to date, *Angel City*, was made for less than \$6,000.) As he has in mind a project for a film entitled *English Lesson* which would be 'a portrait of an imperialist power in a state of decline', the results should be something to look forward to.

In The Picture

The Sailor's Return

One film may not be a New British Cinema make, but *The Sailor's Return* is the kind of production for which British film-makers (or the 322 practitioners and aspirants who call themselves the Association of Independent Producers) have of late been agitating. Determinedly devoid of 'star' names, derisively cheap by Lord Grade's standards, its cultural focus on Britain, rather than some watery spot in mid-Atlantic—it's the very stuff, so the argument goes, of which a new national cinematic identity could be forged. Wardour Street is not exactly reverberating with talk of national cinematic identity, however. What makes *The Sailor's Return* interesting is that the film would almost certainly not have been made without the intervention of British television.

Two years after the Terry Committee reported that 'co-operation' with television might not be such a bad idea, the film industry's face is still set against it—even the Association of Independent Producers bandies talk of penalising television financially for the feature films it shows. And yet, *The Sailor's Return's* £400,000 budget was put up jointly by the National Film Finance Corporation and Euston Films—Thames Television's film-making subsidiary.

The film is directed by Jack Gold, who is quite rightly lionised by British TV moguls while provoking decidedly mixed sentiments in the breasts of their film industry counterparts. And it introduces to British cinema not only a potential black, female star (Nigeria-born Shope Shodeinde), but a new lighting cameraman, Brian Tufano, who recently quit his position as the BBC's ace photographer for the vagaries of the film business.

Until now, *The Sailor's Return* has had a long and dispiriting history of not being made. The rights to David Garnett's 1920s novel about the relationship between a 19th century African princess and her sailor husband, and its destruction by the hostility of the rural English community to which they return, were bought by William Wyler in 1953, the

year of *Roman Holiday*. In 1971, Otto Plaschkes, the producer of *Georgy Girl*, bought the rights from Wyler, with financial backing from the NFFC. Apart from the difficulties of finding appropriate stars (one of whom had to be both female and black): 'We tried to set it up at the very point when English films came under a cloud,' says Plaschkes. 'The Americans had virtually withdrawn from the UK and everyone was running for the international gold.'

Plaschkes had worked with Jack Gold on *The Bofors Gun* (the director's first film for the cinema) and Gold was involved in *The Sailor's Return* from the outset. When he signed a three-picture contract with Thames in early 1977, Gold proffered the project to programme director Jeremy Isaacs and drama head Verity Lambert—and Plaschkes saw his cue for effecting a 'marriage' between the NFFC and Euston Films, which was 'just beginning to dip its toes into the possibly murky waters of feature film production.'

What is Thames/Euston getting for its money? Whatever it's getting, it won't be getting it on television any earlier for having co-financed it. After the film's regulatory five-year life in the cinema, Thames should have first option in its purchase for the small screen. If, as a result of the Interim Action Committee's deliberations, the British film industry accepts a different limitation on film-to-TV sales, *The Sailor's Return* could be shown on British television earlier than present practices allow. Otherwise, says Plaschkes: 'Both Euston and the NFFC will abide by existing codes. The arrangement has the best of both worlds. No permanent Thames staff have been employed on the film—and none has been thrown out of work by it. As far as the film industry is concerned, here's a film which has been 50 per cent financed by a non-established film source.'

If *The Sailor's Return* reflects a Britain of thatched cottages, oak trees and the stalwart village blacksmith (though one riven by race hatred, unlike last year's all-British, even lower cost *Black Joy*, despite its gritty setting in

Brixton back streets), it was gratifying to find that the only American accent audible on the Cotswold location belonged to a passing tourist. Had the film been financed by a conventional film company, star names—and, in the case of the woman, an American star—would almost certainly have been the order of the day. Euston and the NFFC agreed with Plaschkes that 'the star of the film is the film itself,' and allowed him to cast Tom Bell and the fresh from university Shope Shodeinde in the lead—thereby putting the producer irresistibly in mind of *Georgy Girl*, which starred a then practically unknown Lynn Redgrave.

'That film was no different from this,' Plaschkes says. 'Everyone turned it down, because they considered it a risky, non-commercial art film. But we made it for £230,000 and it made nine million dollars; a lot of money in 1966. I don't think one should back commercial films simply because they are commercial. One should back good films, because the chances are you will end up with a good film which is also commercial.'

Gold, fresh from his debut as producer on *The Medusa Touch* and determined in future to avoid experiences like *Man Friday* (the film was re-cut, without his knowledge, to substitute a more 'optimistic' ending), echoes his sentiment: 'If it's good, it will travel. What doesn't travel is a film which is deliberately made to appeal to the Americans. The Americans can tell whether it's an ersatz property or not. Just how many British films have done well in the States since the great mid-Atlantic race?'

SUE SUMMERS

Telluride

One hesitates to publicise an event like the Telluride Film Festival in case the place should ever be discovered. At the moment, it looks perfect: an 1880 Colorado mining town, frozen in time, its saloons and bordellos gently adapted into restaurants or bakeries, its jail into a library. The town has been taken over by young people who, discarding the values of city life, display an unusual respect for the past.

The Festival is a splendid advertisement for Telluride, which boasts two movie theatres, the Nugget and the Sheridan Opera House. The interior of the Sheridan looks like a set for Lincoln's assassination. The tributes this time were for Ben Carré, Michael Powell and Agnès Varda. It was enterprising and courageous of the Festival directors—Bill Pence, Tom Luddy and William K. Everson—to honour an art director. It is a job few people can fathom, let alone appreciate. Ben Carré is an elder statesman among art directors; he began by designing Emile Cohl's 1906 fantasy *The Pumpkin Race*, came to America in 1912, became art director for Maurice Tourneur, and created the sets for such masterpieces as *The Bluebird* (1918). Telluride prides itself on the quality of the prints it includes in the tributes, and a tinted and toned print of *The Bluebird*, loaned by Eastman House, won many admirers for L'Ecole Carré. Impressive sequences from other Carré films confirmed his enormous contribution to the American cinema: *Don Juan* (1926), *Dante's Inferno* (1935), *Phantom of the Opera* (1925), *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and *A Night at the Opera* (1935), in

'The Sailor's Return': Shope Shodeinde



which Harpo wrecks a performance of *Il Trovatore* by letting down more and more inappropriate backdrops, all painted by Ben Carré.

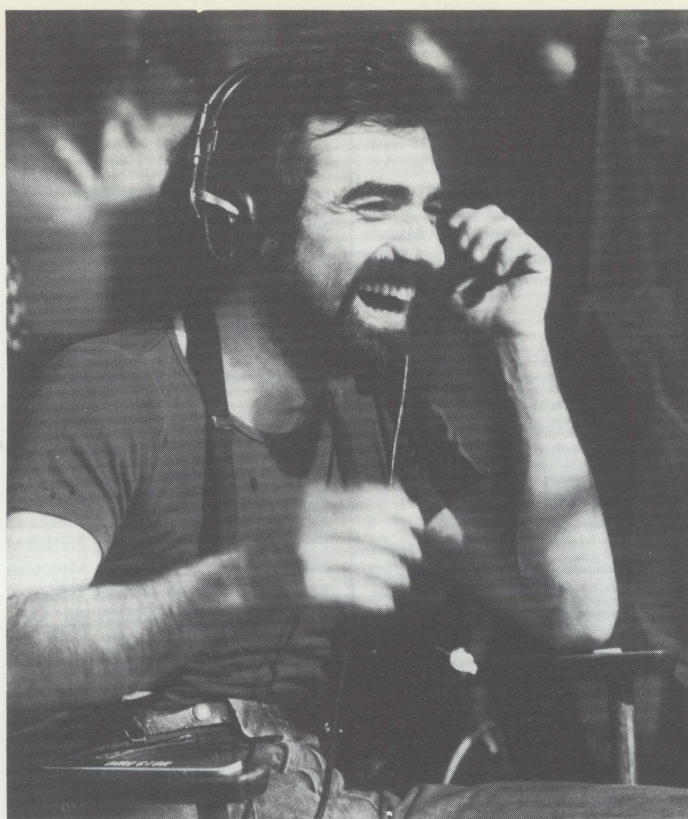
Michael Powell refused to countenance a tribute unless justice was done to the man who started his career, Rex Ingram. As a result, an exquisite MGM studio print of *Scaramouche* (1923) was shown. Said Powell: 'From Ingram I learned standards I hope I have never forgotten. They have cost me dear . . .' The Powell films astonished the Americans, one of whom attacked English film writers like me for concentrating on foreign directors and ignoring the talent in our own backyard. 'He is more surreal than Buñuel, more Kubrick than Kubrick—this man's fantastic!'

Everson announced that several young directors had acknowledged their debt to Powell, including Coppola and Scorsese, so Martin Scorsese would present Powell with his award in person. Michael Powell was stunned at this brilliant piece of showmanship; and was clearly moved by it, for as he said later, he regards Scorsese as the finest of the contemporary directors.

The films for Agnès Varda's tribute had the girl next to me in floods of tears, echoed by a torrential downpour outside. Despite the unpaved streets, and what felt like a flash flood removing one's shoes, the Varda programmes were well attended. Appropriately enough, Bill Everson was at the same time running the deluge from *Noah's Ark* (1929) at the Community Centre, in a programme of disaster movies from the great years of Hollywood special effects. Films were deliberately scheduled against each other, for part of the Festival credo is that horseback rides and mountain hikes are as much part of Telluride as the movies—and you can never see all the movies. New films included the Australian *Picture Show Man*, an enchanting comedy about travelling projectionists in the 1920s, and the harrowing Soviet film *The Ascent*, which has haunted me ever since. Set during the German occupation of the Ukraine, this study of collaboration was shot in minus forty degree temperatures, and it cost the lives of three men. It was directed by Larissa Shepitko, a woman film-maker who studied with Dovzhenko.

I feared for the fate of *Winstanley*, which was confronting an American audience for the first time, but they seemed to cotton on to the intricacies of 17th century English life with ease and received the picture warmly. It was a curious sensation, however, to emerge from the stark black-and-white of the Surrey heath into the fierce brilliance of the Rockies, with their snow-capped peaks and aspen forests, and the fascinating town of Telluride, apparently built for a movie, jolting one from 1649 all the way to 1880.

KEVIN BROWNLOW



Martin Scorsese

American Boy

'United Artists wanted me to take a bit of a rest, though this hasn't really been very restful . . .' Martin Scorsese was spending most of his recent two days in London on the telephone, trying to find someone in New York who could clarify what was happening with his stage show, *The Act*. He was wondering whether he should return there or to Los Angeles, where he had two films waiting to be completed, a two-hour record of a celebratory concert by The Band, *The Last Waltz*, and a documentary/biographical collage of stories concerning an old friend, Steven Prince. 'I did *New York, New York*, then I had two weeks off, and during the two weeks I prepared *The Last Waltz* . . .'

The famous Scorsese energy was understandably muted, though his passion on subjects such as music and the emotional mix of films, family and ethnic background was ready to be touched. Asked whether the film about Prince, *American Boy*, will be feature length, he replies, 'About a million hours, like the one about my parents, *Italian American*. I like to do documentaries while I do features, to keep my hand in. That's when you get back to roots.' And on *The Last Waltz*: 'there are roots there, too. The songs mean very strong things to me.'

Of the two films, *The Last Waltz* is nearest to completion. 'I guess you could call it a documentary. I feel it was purely a musical film, dealing with people on the road. It was shot in 35 mm by Michael Chapman (who did *Taxi Driver*) and as camera operators we had people like Laszlo Kovacs and Vilmos Zsigmond. The Band gave its last performance; it was

Thanksgiving Day and a big party. We had a Strauss orchestra and a set built by Boris Leven (who did *New York, New York*) and chandeliers, two of which were from *Gone With the Wind*. The whole concert was mixing William Cameron Menzies and a Visconti-Cocteau kind of effect. It was a seven-hour concert, so my idea of shooting in 35 mm was hard to do because the camera ran out faster and overheated a good deal. But it worked out better because the visuals were quite good. Then we got involved in a week's shooting inside the sound studio, MGM. I did 'The Wait' in three days, and 'Evangeline', an old bayou song, and 'The Last Waltz' itself—very much given the camera treatment of *New York, New York*, very flowing. Then I shot about four days documentary over a period of three to five months, and then we just intermixed them. It's almost like a record album.

'The guests included Ronnie Hawkins, whom they started with, Doctor John, Muddy Waters, Paul Butterfield, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Neil Diamond, Eric Clapton and Bob Dylan. It's really just a film about The Band, and The Band giving up the road. As they're leaving the stage, you hear Robbie Robertson saying that the road was their school. What did it teach them? Like, survival. He said, "We just couldn't get any more from the road. Maybe I'm superstitious, but we feel the road gave us a great deal and we'd be pushing our luck. A lot of good people who went on the road are gone—Hank Williams, Janice." Then he started listing the names, ending with Elvis. And then you hear the crowd roar, and "The Last Waltz" theme comes in from the sound stage.'

If *The Last Waltz* might be seen

as filling in some personal background to the musical interests and construction of *New York, New York*, then *American Boy* clearly serves the same function for Scorsese's non-genre film-making—the realistic groundwork for *Mean Streets*, for example. 'These kinds of documentary are very touchy, because you're exploring a person but you can't take advantage of him. I'm making a film about Steve Prince. I'm not literally a participant in the stories, but we act up some scenes. I am in the film, talking, and if I get angry or joke around, it's there. Mardik Martin and my wife Julia Cameron decided on the structure, what stories were to be told first. It starts from childhood, though I don't know how much of that stuff we'll use. It starts with pranks, silly pranks. Someone walks into the room and they fight and we shoot that.'

Asked where are the American girls in *American Boy*, Scorsese demurs. 'There are some girls, but the girls' story is not important. It's about America and being on the road, rock musicians and the dope and the guns. It's family, it's the story about his family, really that's more important.' The world, apparently, is similar to the one Scorsese describes for his projected feature on boxer Jake LaMotta, *Prize Fighter*, to star Robert De Niro: 'It's truly a man's world, an ascetic world, like a monk, a priest.' For Scorsese also, 'the LaMotta film is going home again.'

Given the autobiographical nature of his films, and his free-wheeling, improvisatory techniques, Scorsese's insistence on his need for firm structure is perhaps surprising (though a key factor in his working relationship with long-time collaborator Mardik Martin). The structure, however, emerges in unusual ways. 'It comes out through people.' In *Mean Streets*, with Charlie and Johnny Boy: 'The structure is mainly through the scenes with them, the variations on what they're saying. Some people think it's just repetition, but it's not, it's intensity, less intensity then more and more. It's like a musical theme.' And in *New York, New York*: 'The opening for me was very important—the big, long pick-up sequence. That was planned like a musical number. The dialogue goes on for a long while, they don't give up, you just know these people are destined for self-destruction. Whether they know it or not, they're getting closer, they're going to get each other, whether they like it or not.'

RICHARD COMBS
LOUISE SWEET

First Time Out

'He'll either end up Director-General or in prison!' said one of his superiors about BBC drama producer Graham Benson. It has been a good year for Benson—his first series (of short filmed dramas) as producer, *Premiere*, was transmitted to general acclaim. But he's had ample time to acquire that

characteristic *chutzpah*, much in evidence at the Edinburgh TV Festival, as he puffed away at a cigar, Lew Grade style, playing the producer. Originally a theatre stage manager, Benson joined the BBC as an Assistant Floor Manager in 1968, and later became a Production Assistant, working on series such as *Shoulder to Shoulder* (1974), *The Glittering Prizes* (1976) and one-offs such as Jack Rosenthal's *The Evacuees* (1975), and Clive Donner's *Rogue Male* (1976).

The idea for *Premiere* came from the BBC Plays Department, who were anxious to encourage new drama directors on film by providing a low-budget slot. The BBC were already running strands of drama designed to encourage young writers, such as *Second City Firsts* and *Centre Play*. Innes Lloyd saw the series off the ground, producing Alan Bennett's *A Little Outing*, directed by top TV cameraman Brian Tufano (who shot Bergman's *The Lie*, Jack Gold's *Stocker's Copper*, Ken Loach's *The Price of Coal*, etc.). Irene Shubik was subsequently handed the series, and it was intended that Benson should come in as co-producer. In the event Shubik crossed to Thames TV, and Benson was left in charge.

There was only a short time in which to set up the six films, and Benson realised he couldn't commission too many scripts or take a risk on newer writers. He relied therefore on experienced writers, although novelist Alan Sillitoe and Richard O'Brien (creator of *The Rocky Horror Show*) had not written for TV before. Of the new directors three came from within the BBC, although Benson is quick to point out that 'people were selected for their talent and approach, not where they came from.' He admits, on the other hand, to feeling 'some responsibility for easing that bottleneck in the BBC... Had the [financial] climate been

different, there were people in the BBC who would be directors by now.'

Made for a budget of about £25,000 each, the films were in preparation for four months and shot over a period of ten weeks, back to back. The last film, *The Obelisk*, an adaptation of an E. M. Forster story, was shot in March 1977, and all six films were edited and ready for transmission by August.

Undoubtedly the series has thrown up three, possibly four directors worth watching in the future—no mean average. Richard O'Brien's *A Hymn from Jim*, about a pop star who murders his boy friend flat-mate with a gold disc, is a fun-piece that doesn't pretend to significance in its parody of a grotesque industry. Ex-cameraman Colin Bucksey shot it at Ealing Film Studios (exteriors included), and his direction, deliberately self-conscious and stylised, brilliantly reinforces the dark humour as the piece becomes a marvellous pastiche of B-movies. In a stunning mirror sequence the hero sings his latest hit, a narcissistic duet, and his mirror image responds. There's an equally memorable shot in Brian Clark's *There's No Place*, directed by Graham Baker (who had previously made the independent *Leaving Lily*, a First World War ghost story). Two teenagers find a temporary home in a virtually deserted building; the camera literally descends a drain-pipe and watches soapsuds flushing into a drain, tell-tale signs of occupation and of the teenagers' final expulsion from Eden.

Neither Alan Bennett's script, the best of the series, nor Brian Tufano's direction can be faulted for *A Little Outing*, a characteristically bitter-sweet reflection on old age, focusing on a family visit to an old folks' home. And Roger Bamford, a BBC production manager who directed Alan

Sillitoe's *Pit Strike* (about a bible-quoting Nottinghamshire miner picketing London power stations during the 1972 miners' strike), showed great promise in his handling of a variety of location scenes, including scuffles between police and pickets and the emptying of a coal-wagon on the run. Giles Foster, who made *Devices and Desires* while a student at the Royal College of Art, directed the only period piece, *The Obelisk*, but his face-hugging close-ups and self-consciously authentic props rather blunted the irony of Forster's story.

Graham Benson, who has also produced a documentary on Terence Rattigan and a Rhys Adrian play, is now working on *Premiere II*. Directors include Frederic Raphael and ex-National Film School student Malcolm Mowbray. If the second series is anything like as good as the first, Benson can confidently light up another cigar and blow smoke at the future.

PAUL MADDEN

Paris Festival

Coming in November, the Paris Festival can often obtain films completed at the very end of the year; and although the 1977 programme was a somewhat hit and miss affair, it produced half a dozen distinctive works not seen elsewhere, as well as useful short retrospective sessions of Hungarian and Indian films.

Now released after three years on the shelf, the Iranian *Mina Cycle* by Daryoush Mehrjui is as bitter a study of corruption as has come from any Third World country, dealing with the gradual involvement of a boy from the provinces in the lucrative game of selling black market blood to hospitals. Despite some script contrivances, Mehrjui clearly

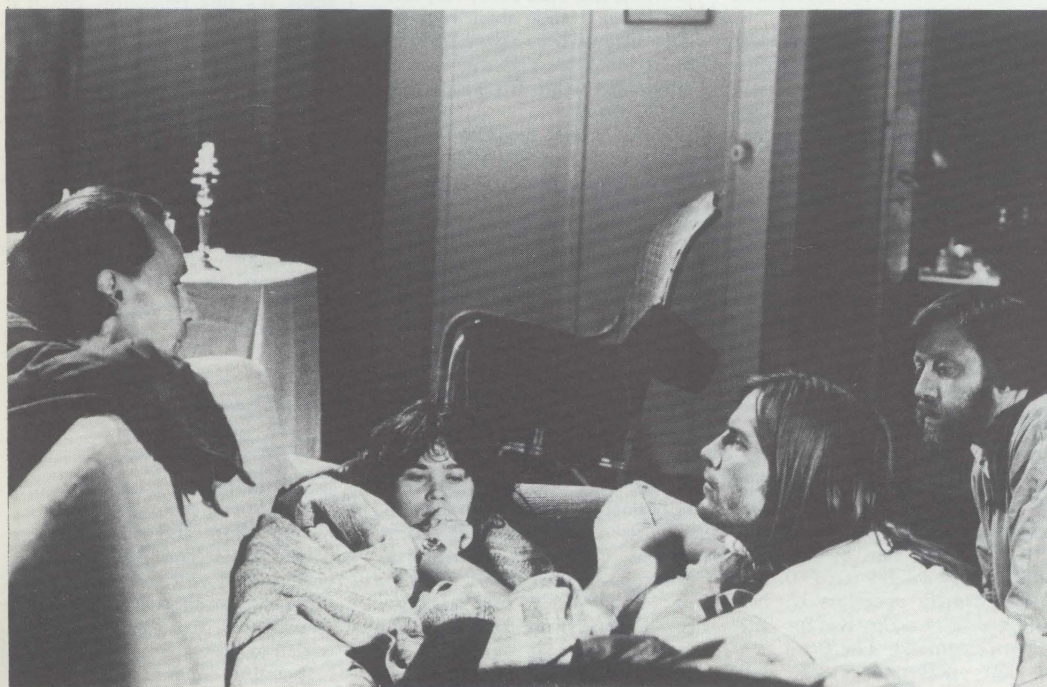
shows how corruption can begin as a pastime and then move into ever-widening circles, especially in societies where bribery is an accepted fact of daily life. Surprisingly, in this context, the film is also quite funny in a ghoulish way and extremely beautiful in its exteriors, such as the night scenes around the hospital with the inmates huddling like shrouded ghosts amid the trees, or the early morning sequence shot in light blue tones showing the young man leading a lorry-load of vagrant donors eager for the money which their tainted blood will bring. It was sad to hear from Mehrjui that the Iranian New Wave has temporarily petered out, with only half a dozen films in production and no immediate prospects for him either. Even after three years, it is amazing that such an unflattering film as this has been allowed out.

It was easy to call Shuji Terayama's *The Boxer* a Japanese *Rocky*, because he openly acknowledges not only that film but a whole generation of American boxing pictures—ambitious youngster being coached by ailing veteran, leading up to the big fight which is to make his name. Adapting someone else's script, and shooting and editing in an astonishing five weeks, Terayama has made the subject his own in that the unusually straight documentary content (influenced no doubt by his years as a sports correspondent) is leavened by a characteristic collection of Terayama eccentrics. The disparate elements don't quite hold together, yet the shooting style is always surprising and exuberant, especially in the long training sequences shot on various locations around the city.

Peter Weir's *The Last Wave*, in which Richard Chamberlain's lawyer finds that he is able to 'dream' himself into strange Aboriginal secrets concerning the threat of destructive tidal waves, moves away from the lush ambiguities of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* in favour of the harsher world of his earlier work. It is a tribute to Weir that one comes to believe in the Aborigines' power of precognition, and Chamberlain's progress through damp night streets to a dark cave below Sydney covered with ancient murals contains several jolting visual coups. The opening reel, with a hailstorm erupting from cloudless skies, first in a desert town and then in the city, shows Weir's atmospheric skills at full stretch—by the end, the rain has become a powerful symbol of the unknown.

Two contrasting items from the Hungarian selection: Márta Mészáros' *The Two of Them* is another of her investigations into the lives of troubled women, with both protagonists (Marina Vlady and Lili Monori) coping with dissolute husbands and trying to make a life of their own. Much subtle detail in the highly charged emotional encounters, but I wish I wasn't so alienated by the camera style—mid-shots cutting to close-ups and then more close-ups which,

Jacques Rivette (left) at work on his new film 'Merry-Go-Round', with Maria Schneider, Joe Dallessandro and writer Eduardo de Gregorio



of course, eventually cancel themselves out. Ferenc Andras' *The Devil Beats his Wife and Marries his Daughter* is a very confident first feature set in a village on a day in August which is both state celebration and religious festival. In a series of riotous sketches, Andras traces the efforts of a group of conniving peasants to entertain their relatives and a stuffy visiting bureaucrat to a lunch of *Grande Bouffe* proportions. Hardly anyone comes out of it well, and the celebratory fireworks which accompany the harassed official back to Budapest make an ironic, bitter finale.

The main French entry—Chris Marker's long-awaited *Le Fond de l'Air est Rouge*—is something of a problem: four hours of international strife, strikes, protests and insurrections comprising what Marker terms the Third World War. Lacking the narrative drive of Marcel Ophüls' equivalent epics, the film often seemed like a hundred television documentaries locked together with a haranguing Marxist commentary. When Marker's cheeky humour and editing prowess alight on sequences which can be developed (Castro fiddling with his microphones, Allende in rarely seen conferences and then his daughter's moving requiem after his death), the film finds its *raison d'être*; but further comment must be postponed until it can be seen again with, preferably, a well translated English narration.

JOHN GILLET

1977: Obituary

DECEMBER '76: Nino Martini, Italian actor and singer who appeared in 30s and 40s musical films (*The Gay Desperado*, *One Night With You*); Walter Fitzgerald, British character actor; Irving Lerner, American cameraman (*The Land*), editor and director (*Murder by Contract*, *Studs Lonigan*).

JANUARY: Tom Gries, American director, notably of *Will Penny*; Henri Langlois, founder of the French Cinémathèque and archivist extraordinary; Charles Frend, Ealing director (*San Demetrio*, *London*, *Scott of the Antarctic*, *The Cruel Sea*); Henri-Georges Clouzot, director, best known for the high tension melodrama of *The Wages of Fear* and *Les Diaboliques*; Peter Finch, British actor who excelled at intense, off-beat heroes (*The Nun's Story*, *Sunday*, *Bloody Sunday*, *Network*); Yvonne Printemps, French soprano who appeared in 30s films (*Les Trois Valses*); Carl Zuckmayer, German dramatist and screenwriter (*The Devil's General*, *The Captain from Köpenick*); Frankie Darro, American child actor of the 20s who later played hard-boiled juveniles and starred in B-movies.

FEBRUARY: Andy Devine, husky character actor who drove the *Stagecoach* and featured in many other Westerns; Martin Lisemore, who produced *How Green Was My*

Valley, *The Pallisers* and *I, Claudius* for BBC television; Fritz Rasp, German actor, the seducer in *Metropolis* and Peachum in *The Threepenny Opera*; T. C. Worsley, former drama and television critic of the *Financial Times*; Pauline Starke, Hollywood silent star (*Shanghai*, *Devil's Cargo*); Anthony Nicholls, British actor, often played officers and gentlemen (*The Hasty Heart*, *Victim*); Henry Hull, versatile American actor (*Werewolf of London*, *Lifeboat*, *The Chase*).

MARCH: John Hubley, American animator who worked for UPA (*Mr Magoo*) before making numerous films of his own (*Adventures of an Asterisk*, *Moonbird*, *The Hat*); Eddie 'Rochester' Anderson, black actor who rolled his eyes for Jack Benny and appeared in many 30s and 40s films (*Green Pastures*, *You Can't Take It With You*, *Cabin in the Sky*); Peter Foldes, animator (*Animated Genesis*, *Hunger*); Nunnally Johnson, scriptwriter (*The Grapes of Wrath*, *Tobacco Road*), producer and director (*The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*, *The Three Faces of Eve*).

APRIL: Jim Thompson, American novelist (*The Getaway*) who worked on the screenplays of Kubrick's *The Killing* and *Paths of Glory*; Ricardo Cortez, Latin lover of Hollywood silents, starring with Garbo in *The Torrent*; Jacques Prévert, poet and screenwriter, long associated with Marcel Carné (*Une Partie de Campagne*, *Le Jour se Lève*, *Les Enfants du Paradis*); Bryan Foy, head of Warner's B-picture unit in the 20s and producer of low budget thrillers for four decades; Kinuyo Tanaka, Japanese actress (*Life of O'Haru*) and director; Marion Gering, American director most active in the 30s (*Devil and the Deep*); Karl Ritter, German director active in the Nazi period (*Pour le Mérite*, *Stukas*).

MAY: Sol Halprin, long head of 20th Century-Fox camera department and pioneer developer of the Cinemascope process; Herbert Wilcox, veteran British producer and director, notably of films starring his wife Anna Neagle (*Victoria the Great*, *Spring in Park Lane*, *Odette*); Luis Cesar Amadori, Argentinian director; John P. McGowan, Hollywood screenwriter (*Lady Be Good*, *Born to Dance*, *Broadway Rhythm*); Joan Crawford, leading lady; Christian Matras, French cinematographer, notably for Renoir and Ophüls (*La Grande Illusion*, *Madame De*, *Lola Montès*).

JUNE: Richard Snider, American TV and documentary director; Roberto Rossellini; Geraldine Brooks, American actress who played intense ingénues in the 40s (*Possessed*, *The Reckless Moment*); Robert Hartford-Davis, British producer/director, mainly of low-budget second features; Jacques Perret, editor of *L'Avant-Scène du Cinéma*; Abner Biberman, American character actor, often playing Indian braves, also director; William Castle, horror specialist (*Macabre*, *The Tingler*) and producer of



Groucho with Margaret Dumont



Joseph Cotten, Geraldine Brooks in 'The Reckless Moment'



Jacques Prévert with Picasso



Jean Hagen, Sterling Hayden in 'The Asphalt Jungle'

Rosemary's Baby; Stephen Boyd, debonair Irish actor, notably in blockbusters (*The Man Who Never Was*, *Ben Hur*, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*).

JULY: William Ziegler, film editor (*My Fair Lady*, *Topaz*); Erik Chitty, British film and TV actor; Irmgard von Cube, German-born scriptwriter who worked in France

(Mayerling) and Hollywood (*Johnny Belinda*); Miriam Brickman, British casting director who worked with Anderson, Reisz and Roeg; Eugene Deckers, French actor in many British films (*The Lavender Hill Mob*, *Father Brown*).

AUGUST: Edward Chapman, British actor, often playing patriarchal northerners (*Things to Come*, *It Always Rains on Sunday*); Alfred Lunt, distinguished stage actor who made rare film appearances (*Sally of the Sawdust*, *The Guardsman*); George Oppenheimer, American screenwriter (*A Day at the Races*, *Two Faced Woman*); Vince Barnett, veteran American actor, often playing gangsters (*Scarface*, *The Killers*); H. C. Potter, director (*Hellzapoppin*, *Mr Blandings Builds His Dream House*); Jean Hagen, versatile actress (*Adam's Rib*, the brass-voiced silent star in *Singin' in the Rain*); Jerry Bresler, American producer (*The Vikings*, *Major Dundee*); Delmer Daves, prolific director, notably of Westerns like *3:10 to Yuma*; Roberto Infascelli, producer/director of spaghetti Westerns; John Howard Lawson, screenwriter, one of the Hollywood Ten (*Algiers*, *Sahara*); Sebastian Cabot, portly British character actor (*Kismet*, *The Family Jewels*); Groucho Marx, alias Rufus T. Firefly alias J. Cheever Loophole . . . ; Elvis Presley.

SEPTEMBER: Ethel Waters, black American actress (*Cabin in the Sky*, *Member of the Wedding*); Maurice King, producer, notably of *The Brave Ones*; Maria Callas, who starred, but did not sing, as Paoletti's *Medea*; Eugene Shuftan, German-born cinematographer who invented the Shuftan process (*Menschen am Sonntag*, *Quai des Brumes*, *The Hustler*); Leopold Stokowski, conductor (*One Hundred Men and a Girl*, *Fantasia*); Zero Mostel, pop-eyed American comedian whose manic energies were best exploited by Mel Brooks in *The Producers*.

OCTOBER: Ralph Truman, British actor often in costume roles (*Henry V*, *Quo Vadis*, *El Cid*); Tay Garnett, director (*Her Man*, *Mrs Parkington*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*); Sir Michael Balcon; Fred F. Finklehoffe, American scriptwriter and producer (*For Me and My Gal*, *Meet Me in St. Louis*); Bing Crosby; James M. Cain, American novelist (*Double Indemnity*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*) and occasional scriptwriter; Elisabeth Flickenschmidt, German actress.

NOVEMBER: Joan Tetzel, American actress of second leads in post-war Hollywood; Ted Ray, British radio comedian who made occasional film appearances (*A Ray of Sunshine*, *Elstree Calling*); Richard Addinsell, prolific composer, best known for his Warsaw Concerto in *Dangerous Moonlight*; Florence Vidor, elegant silent screen star; Victor Francen, Belgian-born actor of suave heroes in French cinema, later moved to Hollywood where he appeared in war dramas (*Passage to Marseille*); actor Richard Carlson; Terence Rattigan.



Filming **HIGHS**

'Dites-lui que je l'aime': Gérard Depardieu



The 1977 London Film Festival featured two adaptations from Patricia Highsmith: Wim Wenders' *The American Friend* (first seen at Cannes, and deriving from *Ripley's Game*); and Claude Miller's *Dites-lui que je l'aime*, based on *This Sweet Sickness*. While it is no doubt too soon to talk about a Highsmith renaissance, the coincidence, even occurring among a generation of film-makers weaned on Hitchcock, is somewhat remarkable, since both directors have also felt it imperative radically to alter the novels' characters, perspective and plot, and neither of them shares the lady's legendary misanthropy, misogyny or taste for human monsters. Both self-confessed pessimists, Miller and Wenders are alike afflicted by a contagious liking for their characters. Both have subtly done away with the ethical poles of Patricia Highsmith's somewhat puritan morality, and at the same time they have no less subtly done away with the norm that the novelist so carefully establishes as lying at the surface centre of her Manichean universe.

From *This Sweet Sickness*, whose mad scientist hero, David, refuses to recognise that the woman he loves is indifferent to him and married to a succession of other people, Miller has managed to take several stages further the affectionate misanthropy of *The Best Way to Walk* and to make the psychotic—and homicidal—outbursts of his fixated lover (sympiotically played by Gérard Depardieu and pursued by a no less riveting Miou-Miou) both plausible and touching. Wenders, no less miraculously, has used the multiple Mafia killings of *Ripley's Game* (in which a Machiavellian Ripley gets a neighbour with a gently fatal blood disease trapped into becoming a hired killer) for another study of the elusive, and inadequate, nature of male

friendships; and another exposé of the seductive power of American colonialism, which charms its conquests literally to death.

The interview with Claude Miller was recorded in Paris in October 1977, after his film had opened there and after he'd seen *The American Friend*. The first part of the interview with Wim Wenders, in which he shows himself amenable to theory, literary discussion and general discursiveness, was recorded in Munich in August 1976, a few weeks before shooting on the film began. (It first appeared in a slightly different form in a monograph on Wenders published by the Toronto Film Festival.) The second part, noticeably more pragmatic, was recorded a year later, after the first screenings.

Claude Miller: October, 1977

CLAUDE MILLER: My un-favourite question about the film is why I chose a central character who's a psychopath or a madman. It's not that it's a stupid question, but it annoys me. Because I'm certain that as long as I go on making films, I'll always have those sorts of characters. The point is that I don't want the people in my films to be judged in terms of sympathy or antipathy. There are no traitors in my films, no bad guys as far as I'm concerned. I think what really bothers me is that when people say 'mad', they mean guilty. They mean that David is a monster and that he is decisively to blame. And I find something fundamentally dishonest about that type of moralising: because, despite the character's evident excesses, I was careful to leave room for a degree of identification. To put it more simply, I believe that anyone in a state of passion—or simply in the first stages of being in love—can imagine himself killing someone or doing something just as extraordinary. He may not literally do it, but the impulse is there: I'm convinced that what David is doing on the screen is no more than other people are doing in their minds.

This doesn't mean I'm trying to justify murder: it isn't justifiable. It simply means that my attitude to my characters is not that of an examining magistrate or a public prosecutor. Which is not to say that I go out of my way to make David sympathetic. There are times when he's really odious. Of course I like him, but then I like all my characters.

However sympathetic David may be, he is responsible for other people dying. In Highsmith's novel *This Sweet Sickness*, he

MITH

Jan
Dawson

'Dites-lui que je l'aime': Miou-Miou



causes three deaths: that of the husband of the woman he loves and that of the woman who loves him (and in both cases, whether it's murder or involuntary manslaughter is left very ambiguous); and finally, his own death, when he jumps from a window when he's cornered by the police. In your film, the husband's death is an accident which David has provoked only by wishing it . . .

It's like a magic spell . . .

... the girl's death is murder, since we see David unequivocally knifing her; and the final death is not his but that of the woman he loves, which he provokes through one of his many miscalculated gestures of tenderness.

Let's take the murders one at a time. Up to the husband's death, the film is fairly faithful to the novel. But from that point on the novel is predominantly a thriller, with a police investigation and the mechanics of David's double identity providing a major part of the action. The point where the film seriously departs from the text is the point where, for me, the novel becomes less interesting. Because what interested me was the obsessive passion, the characters' feelings, the whole affective dimension of the book; and not the mechanics of the thriller.

One reason I killed the husband differently in the film is that I didn't want there to be any question of legal guilt. I didn't want David to be bothered by the police—not least because I think the French police are unfilmable. Besides, I wanted to make—if you'll forgive the expression—a psychological film rather than a thriller. I wasn't interested in how David disposes of the body. I'm interested not in legal guilt but in moral guilt. And in moral guilt in relation not to me but to the other characters: in particular, David's moral guilt in relation to Lise (the wife, Annabelle in the novel).

The second murder, that of Juliette (Effie in the novel), is virtually the same as in the book.

Except that in the book David throws Effie violently out of his bed and doesn't even realise that he's killed her, whereas in your film he stabs her repeatedly in the back.

It's funny, I've moved so far from the book since I started working on the script that I'd completely forgotten that. It's true that he kills her much more deliberately in the film, but as in the novel, he's in a completely hallucinatory state, he thinks for a moment that she's Lise. Of course, the knife is a major addition, but that relates to a whole thematic which is latent in all Highsmith's novels and which is always going to be more explicit in my films. There's no way I can make a film about emotions without dealing with sexuality as well. I find Patricia Highsmith's novels very highly charged sexually. But because she is a popular writer (and I don't mean that pejoratively), and also probably something of a puritan, the sexuality in her books is always rather oblique. However, I don't believe you can talk about love without talking about sexuality; and I also think that murder involves a type of sexual charge of its own.

Luc Béraud (the co-scenarist) and I thought of Juliette's murder as a kind of defloration for David: which is why, apart from the obvious symbolism of the knife, it's both violent and tender. This is probably going to sound ridiculous, and perhaps I

shouldn't even say it, but it's why I chose Depardieu. I wanted the character to be physically both very touching and very frightening. And you know the comparison I had in mind? A male sex organ. Touching and weak, but at the same time frightening and a little ugly. That's David too. There's even a kind of embrace: after he hits Miou-Miou and she comes back towards him and he thinks she's Lise, it looks for a moment like an embrace.

I think it's that moment of tenderness with Juliette which makes her death so hard to take.

You've got to believe me, I'm really not interested in shock effects. If it's painful for the audience, it's painful for me as well. Though I must admit, until you mentioned it just now, I hadn't thought the embrace might look as if he were accepting her love and make the murder seem that much more brutal. I'd simply thought of it as a defloration, which would inevitably be a disaster, since for me David is a character who's incapable of making love, who's impotent in some sense. I wanted him to represent a denial of the flesh, which is one way of explaining this passion he feels for a woman he barely knows.

But whereas in the novel the object of this passion is a girl he knew for a month two years ago, in your film she's a childhood playmate.

They're rather like the children in *Peter Ibbetson*. I just wanted to suggest that the love between them was frozen at pre-puberty stage. What interested me more was the parallel between Juliette's love—a total love of which sexuality is a normal part—and David's asexual and 'crystallised' passion. The third death isn't really a murder; it's just another link in the chain of catastrophes he unleashes. I've always found it odd that, at the end of the novel, David makes no attempt to carry off the girl (Annabelle/Lise), that he's primarily concerned with evading the police. Of course, in the book, he imagines she's with him, he even orders a meal for the imaginary woman sitting opposite him. But I don't think you could get away with that in the cinema. By which I mean that I think the theme of the split personality is only interesting if it's left implicit. So rather than have him jump to oblivion, I wanted to end with him completely locked into his obsession, carrying her off in her wedding dress.

What was the idea of the second, controversial ending? Of the clock hands moving backwards, and the image freezing on David clutching Lise in her wedding dress just before they fall from the swimming pool gallery?

I know it's a problem, particularly for critics who think that the rest of the film is realism. It was the same with *The Best Way to Walk*: critics, as opposed to audiences, seem to have a hard time accepting the endings of my films. In fact, the idea here was very simple. At the end, the police have caught up with him: they're going to arrest him, try him, and send him to prison or an asylum. Which was of no interest to me. The film was already over, in that there was no possible future for his passion. No future in time, no space for him to go. So what I wanted was to put back the clock a few seconds; because when he's struggling with

Lise, he thinks he sees a look of love on her face. And I wanted to show that and to retreat completely into David's fantasy. Because that's the moment he's going to stay stuck in. Like Anthony Perkins in *Psycho*.

Wenders said that one of the problems for him was eliminating some of the murders in the novel. You've actually added to them.

I didn't say I wasn't interested in murder. I wanted the violent side of David's nature to go as far as murder; I just didn't want him bothered by the police.

I still think that by changing the ending you've inverted one of Highsmith's favourite thematic devices. Her characters tend to divide into the survivors—people like Ripley, who can get away with anything and whose sheer immorality seems to confer on them a kind of grace; and the others, the disaster prone, who include the banal, everyday people who suddenly fall apart and eventually self-destruct. Your David has a foot in each camp, and as a literary purist I find that rather shocking.

That's a purism, or should I say puritanism, you share with the film's French distributors. They thought it immoral that David should survive, and even more so that he should be rewarded for his crimes by a 'happy ending' which allows him to retreat into an absolutely marvellous fantasy.

I think another difference between me and Highsmith is that she draws on some very ancient Judaeo-Christian notions of guilt and innocence which are anathema to me. The fact that her criminals are often possessed of a kind of satanic grace and a seductive charm is also somewhat mythological, not to say mythical. Whereas I'm more interested in characters who accept the full consequences of that core of savagery that lies at the heart of all of us; you could say that what interests me in the characters I want to film is their potential for excess. I suppose that's one reason my films are inclined to end on a rather hysterical note: the characters lose control, and they justify it to themselves in the face of conventional morality and behaviour. I think it's in the moments when they're out of control that people are at their most authentic; which is not to say that they don't terrify me at the same time.

Does that mean you're not particularly interested in Lise?

It's obvious there are only two characters who really interest me: David and Juliette. What I wanted was to show David only as he appears to Juliette, and Lise only as she appears to David. And because I wanted David to represent an obvious denial of sexuality, Lise is usually shown muffled up in very shapeless clothes. The only thing appealing about her is her face, which is why we photographed her for most of the part in tight close-up: the idea was that she doesn't really exist from the neck down.

It's no doubt very immodest of me, but I find Juliette in the film more interesting than Effie in the novel. Partly because I didn't want to make her into a husband-hunter, since I think that's a rather dated idea; and more because I wanted her to accept her passion for David completely, for it to justify even her sometimes reprehensible behaviour. I suppose it's obvious that ultimately I prefer her to David; he's heroic, I feel sorry for him and he moves me; but I like Juliette much more.

But doesn't David's resistance to the delightful Juliette you've created make him even less sympathetic?

Yes, but that wasn't the intention. I simply wanted to demonstrate the impenetrable nature of choice. Of course, most of the audience think he's a jerk not to fall for Miou-Miou, but that's exactly the point: choice is impenetrable, illogical, the reason desire is focused on one object rather than another. And it certainly wasn't my job to make David irresistible to the audience.

Another departure from the novel is the character of David's colleague Wes. Besides changing his name to François, you've also simplified him, made him cruder and less intelligent.

I think that's a weakness in the novel that has become a weakness in the film: even in the book, you can't understand why David, with his passion for purity and the absolute, should hang out with a type like that. One reason I made him cruder was somehow to justify the attraction David holds for Juliette. Because that class of girl, with her looks, is going to be surrounded by guys like that, trying to pick her up in dance-halls. Initially, she's attracted to David because he's shy.

By having François actually try to rape Juliette, aren't you in danger of dividing your characters somewhat rigidly into those of the flesh and those of the spirit? And of upsetting your audience by showing all three of them drinking together immediately afterwards?

I think that's partly a casting error on my part. Christian Clavier (François) is a very good actor, but he doesn't convey the vulnerability I'd had in mind. As for the fact that they all go out drinking after the rape attempt, that may not be normal in terms of narrative conventions in cinema, but I think

it's quite normal in life. Something I really love in the cinema is characters who, after an implied passage of time, reappear in situations which are not psychologically logical. That was one of the things I liked in Bergman's *A Passion*. And it's part of life: you meet couples who seem about to kill one another, and a month later there they are, living quite quietly and happily together. I think there are gaping holes in our knowledge of people, and that getting to know them—or to show them—is a bit like leap-frogging over the holes. I even wanted to go a bit further and have Juliette mend the jacket François has torn while trying to rape her. But Miou-Miou objected on vaguely feminist grounds: she would drink with him, but she wouldn't mend his coat.

It's the same with Lise: three days after her husband's death, she's going out with another man, and I leave her relationship with him deliberately ambiguous. Then too, as in *The Best Way to Walk*, I wanted to show how hard it is to get away from the people in your immediate environment, even after they've done terrible things to you. That's my bastard side as a director: I enjoy putting people in situations that are going to revive their conflicts. And of course it's a question of suspense, of playing on the audience's desires . . . I'm delighted if you find that Hitchcockian, in the sense that, in a thriller like *Psycho* or a psychological film like *Marnie*, the pleasure I get from Hitchcock is that he plays on my desire as a spectator for something deliciously terrifying to happen, something that logically has to happen. And I think the secret desire of the audience at the end of *Dites-lui que je l'aime* is for David to find a tiny space in which to be alone with Lise. Suspense is always a delicate business: you could say that what's pleasurable

in Hitchcock is that he plays with your desire for something slightly catastrophic to happen—and takes it a stage further than you dared to. And, of course, suspense also involves the more formal problem of catharsis.

The first two deaths in your film are built on a suspense principle: in both cases, they're preceded by what looks like a moment of reprieve.

I'm not sure I entirely agree. The way I film the husband's arrival at the chalet, through the peephole, is a way of signalling to the audience that this guy is going to die. At which point, the pleasure comes from postponing the moment of death, the moment of fulfilling the spectator's desire, for as long as possible. And this postponement involves a certain amount of comic business. I think there's always something rather absurd about two men fighting over a woman. One reason I brought in the snow—because we shot that scene in a warm March—is because fights are more violent and ludicrous in cold weather. Even a simple smack on the ear is more painful if your ear is frozen to start with. Anyway, this type of postponed expectation is a very formal procedure, even if it does derive from a deplorable ideology. But I don't agree that it's the same for Juliette's death: I see that as shock rather than suspense—the fact that you pass abruptly from a positive emotional state to a violent, destructive one.

Another change you've made to the novel is that David's dream-house burns down after he has kicked in the television. Was that a reference to Douglas Sirk and *All That Heaven Allows*?

If there is a reference, it's to *Taxi Driver*. Though I'm delighted if there is also a reference to Sirk, because I wanted the film

'Dites-lui que je l'aime': David (Gérard Depardieu) leaves the burning house



visually to recall his Rock Hudson melodramas: picture postcard clichés, with passions exploding inside them. Of course, you can't film a Highsmith novel without Hitchcock's shadow looming from time to time: certain situations, like Juliette exploring the chalet in a state of excited curiosity, are typical of him; but any Hitchcockian shots I used weren't there as quotations, but rather as a desire for effectiveness. Then too, if I started reading Highsmith because of Hitchcock, it was an accident that I discovered *This Sweet Sickness*. I bought it to read on the train when I went to Cannes to raise money for *The Best Way to Walk*, and I thought of Depardieu immediately. But it was rather expensive for me at the time.

There's one aspect of the novel that I reject completely. This came out in a television discussion with Patricia Highsmith. She thinks David is a madman. I think that's a rather stereotyped view of him as the mad genius scientist (though the main reason I made his professional life boring was that I don't know anything about chemical engineering and have no doubt childish scruples about not showing things I don't understand).

It's true what you said, that Wenders and I have both softened Highsmith's monsters. Though there is at least one big difference. Jonathan in *The American Friend* is someone who is manipulated, and who accepts this, whereas David isn't manipulated at all. It's

his attitude which creates the fiction. And Jonathan is a sympathetic character, all through the film. In fact, all the characters in that movie are sympathetic. Whereas I love all my characters, but they're not particularly or consistently likeable. Wenders is obviously more of a humanist than I am. I'm a profound pessimist, and I'm very happy; or at any rate, it doesn't depress me. I think life consists of brief moments of happiness, grounded in tangible things like sexuality and emotion, with long intervals of anguish in between. I'm also convinced that there are as many forms of love as there are people, which is why hardly anyone achieves a successful emotional life. Everyone is wrong about everyone . . .

Wim Wenders: August 1976

You've been talking about filming *Ripley's Game* for a long time. When did the idea first crystallise?

WIM WENDERS: About two years ago, when I tried hard to get the rights for two other Highsmith novels: *Cry of the Owl* and *Tremor of Forgery*. We couldn't get either of them; and it seemed as if the option on every one of her novels was already sold. Anyway, I went to see Patricia Highsmith, twice; and she finally suggested I should read the novel she'd just finished writing, before it was printed, and buy it before anyone else could. It was *Ripley's Game*, and I liked it from the beginning.

It's funny it should have happened that way round. Because it reads almost like a parody of a Wenders script. There's the idea of travel, of constantly crossing frontiers, and of very detached murders. In a sense, it's territory you've covered before.

That's not just a coincidence . . . There are some very fine train scenes too. The second murder takes place on a train. It's true, they're always travelling. On the other hand the characters *do* live somewhere, especially the main character, Jonathan, who's a shopkeeper, a picture framer. He has a family and he's living in very settled conditions. Already that makes it different from my other films.

Do you not see Ripley as the main character?

When I wrote the first draft, about two years ago, I told the whole story from Jonathan's point of view. Highsmith tells it from Ripley's and from Jonathan's, she switches from one to the other at the end of each chapter. When I wrote the first draft, Jonathan really was the central character. He was like the goalkeeper: somebody who *suffered* a story, and who reacted to things that happened to him which he didn't understand. But I don't like that idea for the structure any more; and about two weeks ago, I started writing a completely new script. In the first draft, the camera never switched to a scene where Jonathan wasn't present. Whereas now the film is told from four points of view: Jonathan's, Ripley's, Reeves' and Jonathan's wife's. And it's getting more thrilling . . . I mean, more like a thriller. I don't think there's a precise English word for it . . . There's a German word, *Spannung*, which expresses it perfectly. It's 'tension', but it's also something else. Anyway, there's going to be a lot of tension in it. I've com-

pletely changed the Ripley figure, especially since we finally cast Dennis Hopper. I didn't particularly like Ripley in this novel: I couldn't relate to him, he's so strange . . . And Highsmith's idea of the completely amoral person just doesn't interest me that much. So I've changed him . . . He's not amoral, he's more or less unaware of what he's doing: it's really a game for him, in the beginning. And when he realises how things are going to develop, he even tries to prevent it, only by then it's too late. The whole idea of using Jonathan is just a whim on his part to satisfy his friend Reeves. And when he sees what's finally happening, he himself is very much afraid. He starts drinking a lot.

One of the things which bothers me in the book is that, whereas in the first two Ripley novels he's protecting his own interests, in this one it seems he's never really motivated.

I have to admit there are some serious faults in the novel. When you start to write a script and to analyse it thoroughly, you realise there are some things that simply couldn't happen, they are so unlikely. Especially where Ripley's motivation is concerned. So I've tried to make this more plausible.

Do you refer back to Ripley's past at all?

I refer back to his dealing with forged paintings, but not to a past in which he's killed anybody, or been a complete crook. His job, and the reason he is living in Germany, is that he's importing forged paintings, getting serious-looking certificates for them in Germany, and then selling them back to Texas. And he's doing very well at it. Reeves is a very interesting figure; and I think even in Highsmith's novel, he was, right from the beginning, more interesting for me than Ripley. Jonathan's wife, especially, has undergone some important changes. In the novel she was completely passive, like all Highsmith's women characters; just responding to someone else.

But do you still keep the idea of the banally happy couple, whose lives are completely disrupted through the proposition that Ripley steers their way?

That's the heart of the story. I couldn't change that. But the effects, the *way* their lives are disrupted, that's changed a lot. It was very, very difficult for me. I liked the story too much, without realising until I started writing that I didn't like some of the main characters. That was my big problem.

In the first draft, I was just fascinated by the figure of Jonathan, and I think it was the same for Patricia Highsmith. I don't think she was interested in anyone except Jonathan. Not even Ripley. At least not as much as usual.

I think one idea she does have very strongly is that there's a race of survivors, of people who can get away with anything: Reeves has a charmed life, Ripley has a charmed life. A lot of her novels are about what happens when a survivor touches somebody else.

The idea of surviving is something I really like in her novels. I'm sticking to that. Ripley survives. I think I appreciate the idea of surviving even more than she does. So I think Jonathan's going to survive as well.

The real casualty in the novel doesn't depend on whether or not Jonathan literally survives: I mean, the family. The obvious irony is that Jonathan commits the crimes to protect his wife and child; but by doing so he destroys their family life. Do you keep that? Because whether he survives or not, it's clear from the novel that the marriage itself doesn't.

Yes. I keep that. But there are so many things happening, and so many relationships are changing . . . that's just one of them. There's also the idea of money. In the novel, it's very important that they are poor: that he needs the money, and that he wants to leave something behind for the family after his death. I don't think I've given it so much importance.

If he's not obsessed with the money, is it even more of an accident that he agrees to get involved in the crimes?

It's the way he's being pushed into it. They're blackmailing him in a very subtle way. Not only with money, but with his illness, too. I think I've completely left out all the moral aspects of the story. I've just this second realised it. You could look at it, and even Highsmith does, in various moral ways. In the story, everything is simply falling apart. Not only the relationship between Jonathan and his wife. Everybody, in himself or herself, is cracking up as well. Even Ripley.

It seems to me that the moral in all Highsmith's stories is that crime doesn't pay unless you're a criminal. It comes down to some kind of destiny; it's why they can get away with it and survive, why Ripley can grow rich and lead a gracious life; there are

the criminals and the rest. Are you going to keep that division?

Not at all. I've changed the entire ending, at least from the point where the Mafia killings start and the Mafia intrudes into Ripley's house, I've changed the whole story. Mainly because I just couldn't imagine myself shooting six murders one after another. So I thought of a completely different ending from the point where those murders take place. Not the one in the train, that's somehow a very clean murder. But I realised how impossible it was when I started writing a shooting script. I kept dreaming of being Sam Peckinpah. I think the way the story ends is much more in my own tradition. Without, I think, offending Patricia Highsmith's story. I think she'll like it.

The other thing in the novel that bothers me is the relationship between Ripley and his wife, Heloise. When Highsmith first created Ripley there were hints that he was a repressed homosexual, at least a solitary figure. And suddenly, between novels, he's acquired a kind of model, magazine wife. I don't believe in the relationship, and certainly not in his dependence on her.

She's not in the film. Ripley isn't married, and there's no Heloise. He has a house, he has friends; but no wife. Highsmith and Ripley throw Heloise out of the story after the first hundred pages, when Ripley sends her away, so I thought I could just as well leave her out from the start. Ripley has some nice friends though. He's not a solitary and he's not a homosexual. Not explicitly. But the way he handles Jonathan has a lot to do with homosexuality.

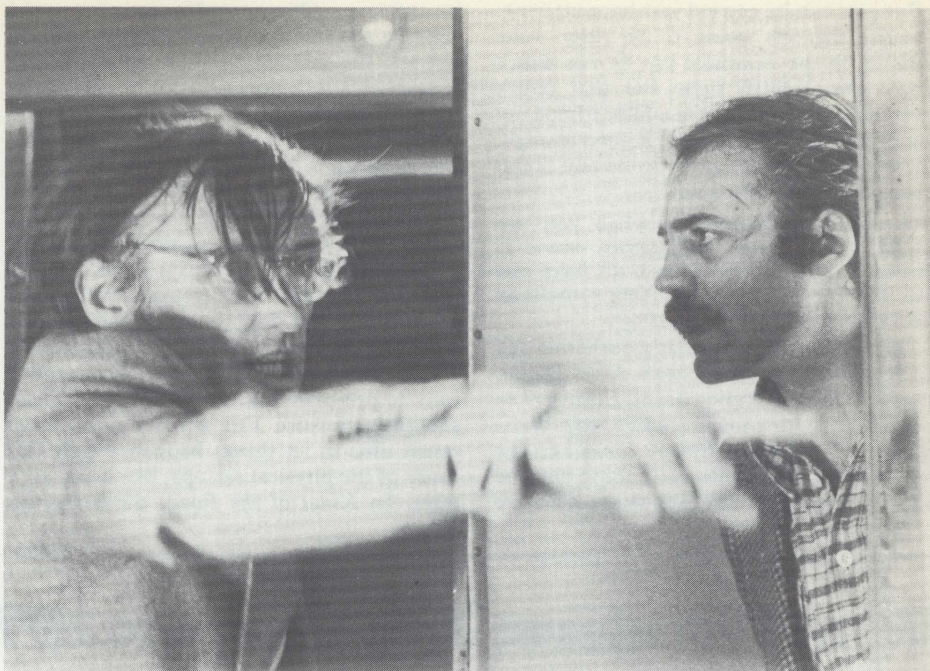
One thing that also connects with *Kings of the Road* is that you have the loner, Ripley, who finds himself for no special reason feeling friendly towards someone, Jonathan, for whom it's not in his interest to feel friendship. It's very out of character, if you're taking the Highsmith character. But it's interesting in terms of your own films.

That was one of the reasons I really liked the story, and why I took it. This very strange friendship that develops. It's not even a guilt feeling towards Jonathan. That would be too cheap.

On the basis of your earlier films, I'd expect you to be attracted to the fact that all the novel's characters are exiles, they none of them live in the country they were born in. With someone like Reeves, we're not even sure where he's from.

Ripley—in my film—is an American, living in Hamburg. Jonathan is Swiss, also living in Hamburg. Which for me is already a strange thing. It's a city towards which I have very hostile feelings. People are always travelling from north to south in my films. At least that's the tendency. I have hostile feelings towards Hamburg, although I like it very much, because the city isn't closed or compact the way Munich is. Hamburg is completely different, you don't have the feeling that it belongs together; so it's the perfect setting for this film. Jonathan wasn't born there . . . he's going to have a Swiss accent, not even a German one . . . nor was his wife. Only their son is going to speak in a perfect Hamburg accent.

The idea of people as exiles—choosing not to live where they were born, or even choosing to forget where they were born—is that something you're fairly obsessed with?



'The American Friend': Dennis Hopper (Ripley), Bruno Ganz (Jonathan). Below: Bruno Ganz

Yes. It's an idea I stick to. The idea is that, not being at home, they are nevertheless at home with themselves. In other words, not being at home means being more at home than anywhere else. That's why I am a little bit afraid of Jonathan and his wife, because they at least are at home somehow as a family.

Have you ever made a film with a home in it before?

No, that's a novelty. And somehow, I'm afraid of it. In *The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty*, for instance, there was one scene where he's having breakfast with a girl, the cashier, in her home. That's the only scene in the film that I really hate. And I realise that it was the only scene in which someone was at home . . . Maybe the idea of being more oneself when one's away is a very personal idea. I can think of some very fine dialogues in hotel rooms, but my fantasy is just going to break if I have to imagine a dialogue in somebody's home. So I hope I can do all

right with Jonathan and his wife, just knowing that they're not really at home; they're just pretending to be. There's an idea of identity behind it. And I hope the idea will show clearly in this film: identity meaning not having to have a home. Or something like that. Awareness, for me, has something to do with not being at home. Awareness of anything. I shouldn't write scripts at home.

Are you shooting the film in English or in German?

I'm going to shoot in three languages, and the film is going to stay trilingual: German, English and a little French. But with different subtitles, depending on where it's shown. But I want the actors to speak the foreign languages badly. I'm not interested in having anyone speak anything correctly.

That fits with what we were saying about dialogue in your films functioning as a kind of abstract expression. At the same time, in this film it will be carrying more plot than it usually does.



But plot can be carried just by muttering. I realise that it's going to be risky. Like Rohmer, in the *Marquise von O*. He didn't handle the German right, but that didn't affect my appreciation of the film. I hope my English, or rather American, is good enough. There's certainly not going to be any literal approach to the dialogue.

The obvious association when you say you're filming this Highsmith novel is *Strangers on a Train*. They both have one idea in common: that of getting somebody else to do your killing for you.

There's another film that's bothering me much more, *Plein Soleil*, with Alain Delon, based on the first Ripley novel. *Strangers on a Train* is haunting me in another way. Writing the script now for *Ripley's Game* I realise that this kind of story always tends to be done the way Hitchcock did it. It's very hard to be

inventive . . . Of course, I'm trying to avoid creating the same emotions in the audience, but it's the techniques that are intruding. Hitchcock's techniques. A lot of his inventions go hand in hand with things in the Highsmith story: as if there were no other way of doing it. And by doing it this way, it's slipping out of my hands. Because, generally—and this is going to be the most difficult thing for me in this film—I don't like inventions that I make at the script stage: I really prefer films that are invented during the shooting, or that don't have so many inventions but rather *trouvailles*. The hard thing about *Ripley's Game* is that it leads automatically to pre-planning. I'm very afraid of the shooting, because I'm afraid I won't have much time to let things happen. Partly because of the physical set-ups, like being on a train. In *Kings of the Road*, there was no

invention at all, when we started. The only invention was the situation: the truck and the itinerary. The rest was *trouvailles*.

Unlike *Kings of the Road*, *Ripley* is going to be in colour. Not just because it derives from someone else's book. Though there must be a connection between my own stories being in black and white, and other people's being in colour . . . Black and white would put *Ripley's Game* in a context where it doesn't belong. Whereas *Kings of the Road* in black and white was exactly in the context to which it did belong. I think black and white is much more realistic and natural than colour. It sounds paradoxical, but that's the way it is. And *Ripley's Game* is such an invention, such a fiction story, that I'd never think of shooting it in black and white and thereby giving it a realistic touch. I would never, ever, shoot a documentary in colour.

Wim Wenders: July-August 1977

You started making *The American Friend* in a very anti-American frame of mind, yet it's now being acclaimed as a homage to the American cinema.

I suppose it's both. The film is really dialectical in its attitude to the American cinema: it's full of love and full of hatred, but it has not become a film that has found a way out of this antagonism. So Ozu is still the myth behind it.

To separate the love from the hate, was it pure chance that so many of your cast were American directors who were also victims of the American system?

That was no accident. It would probably be too much to call them outcasts, but they were always being fought by the system. I think all three of them (Dennis Hopper, Samuel Fuller, Nicholas Ray) represent a certain *cinéma d'auteur* in America. Another thing about using directors as actors: they were the best colleagues I've ever had. They never behaved like actors: they behaved like directors who know what a nuisance it is if you have actors who want to direct.

When you started shooting, you saw the film as Jonathan's story. Yet besides ending up with a title which focuses attention back on Ripley, you have also made him much less of a monster. He even suffers from something approaching a crisis of conscience, and sees himself (in an early scene with Gérard Blain) as someone who draws the line at murder; whereas Highsmith's Ripley virtually starts from there.

The morality I have introduced refers to his relationship with Jonathan, not to anything else. Ripley is able to kill the men on the train without any problems. I think he's still a very amoral person in the film. But maybe he's more charming. I think Dennis is perhaps not the Tom Ripley of *Ripley's Game*, but he has a lot of the Tom Ripley of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. Not that I think his character is so different from the novel. He may start differently, but his ruthlessness at the end . . . I think Dennis is as immoral in his own way as Highsmith's Ripley. Nevertheless, you can never reproach him with anything because of his incredible charm. And that's Ripley, isn't it? As for the title change, I still see it as Jonathan's film. The title, *The American Friend*, is from Jonathan's

point of view, so Jonathan is still the dominant figure.

Why did you abandon the idea of having Jonathan survive? Was it a case of the source material taking over, or just a return to your normal pessimism?

There was something in the story that I missed when I first read the novel, something between the lines, like a permanent and persistent longing for death. It's not exactly articulated, although it has something to do with Jonathan and his illness . . . Anyway, I found when we were halfway through shooting that there was no way of denying it, no way of even trying to change it. At the same time, the pessimism of my earlier films received a very strong reinforcement.

This longing for death is most strongly articulated in the scene where Ripley is alone with his tape-recorder, and it's a note that runs through Hopper's performance.

Dennis' recklessness isn't the same as Ripley's; it's much more personal. His whole life, his personality, his way of acting are just the same. With Bruno Ganz (Jonathan), it's not a personal performance the way it is with Dennis: it's more the mid-European tradition expressing itself in his performance. Sometimes it reminded me of Dirk Bogarde in *Death in Venice*. I don't mean that we ever talked about it; the tradition just added itself in.

Another big change comes at the end. There is a moment before Jonathan dies when he liberates himself from Ripley, when he literally abandons him.

I felt I owed that to Jonathan. Even though he still dies, the fact that he leaves Ripley is a major change. In the novel, he even sacrifices himself for Ripley, he suffers a total loss of identity in the end.

For me, the most striking moment in the film is when Jonathan's wife drives up to Ripley's house to attempt a reconciliation, and he makes that tiny recoiling movement that is Rudiger Vogler's first reaction to human contact in *Kings of the Road*. It's as though his camaraderie with Ripley has become stronger than his original motives. And I find it makes the character almost schizophrenic. It's as if Highsmith's Jonathan has a mid-movie collision with the characters from your earlier films.

That was the most carefully preconceived, pre-planned scene in the entire film. There was nothing casual about it. Not that we'd seen the connection between Jonathan and the Rudiger character from the start. That was something we discovered as we went along. I could also see parallels with Hans Zischler sometimes in Dennis' performance. Because Hans has the same kind of charm, the same way of seducing Rudiger. I know both the wife and the home play a smaller part in the film than I'd originally intended. Marianne's part in the script was much bigger than in the final cut. We had a complete story about her being an out of work actress, but we had to cut it because there were too many loose ends for this story. Unlike *Kings of the Road*, which was conceived only as loose ends.

I agree that Jonathan's home looks a bit like an extended waiting room. In the end, I thought his workshop was more a way to define their home than the home itself. I mean, the difference between the house and the workshop gives a definition to the notion of home. Their house may not look like the setting for a seven-year marriage, but it's less provisional than Ripley's. How do you show a stable home in the cinema? Have you ever seen suburban stability in a movie without being bored?

I suppose the disconcerting thing is that while the characters have the same malaise as those in your earlier work, the picture looks so much more like a traditional thriller. It takes a while to realise that you are doing through style what you have previously done through content—demonstrating the extent to which the Americans have colonised our sub-conscious.

If I have to make a comparison, I relate it very much to *The Goalkeeper* and to no other film. That was my first 35 mm film, and it's also about someone who commits a crime without caring at all for the crime itself. You know, I've said it before but I don't usually read interviews with film directors. I like to read descriptions of the films, but interviews with film-makers are always second-hand, more so than with, for example, politicians. Because there are the films. They're always second-hand, because if they know what they're doing, they've already done it. ■

MUNICH'S CLEANED PICTURES

John Gillett

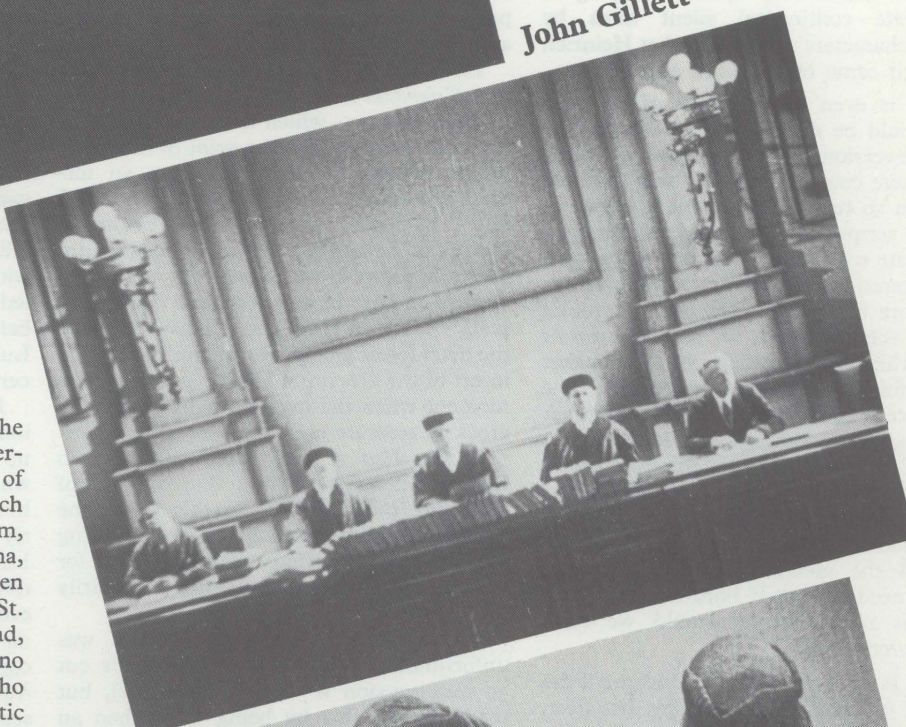
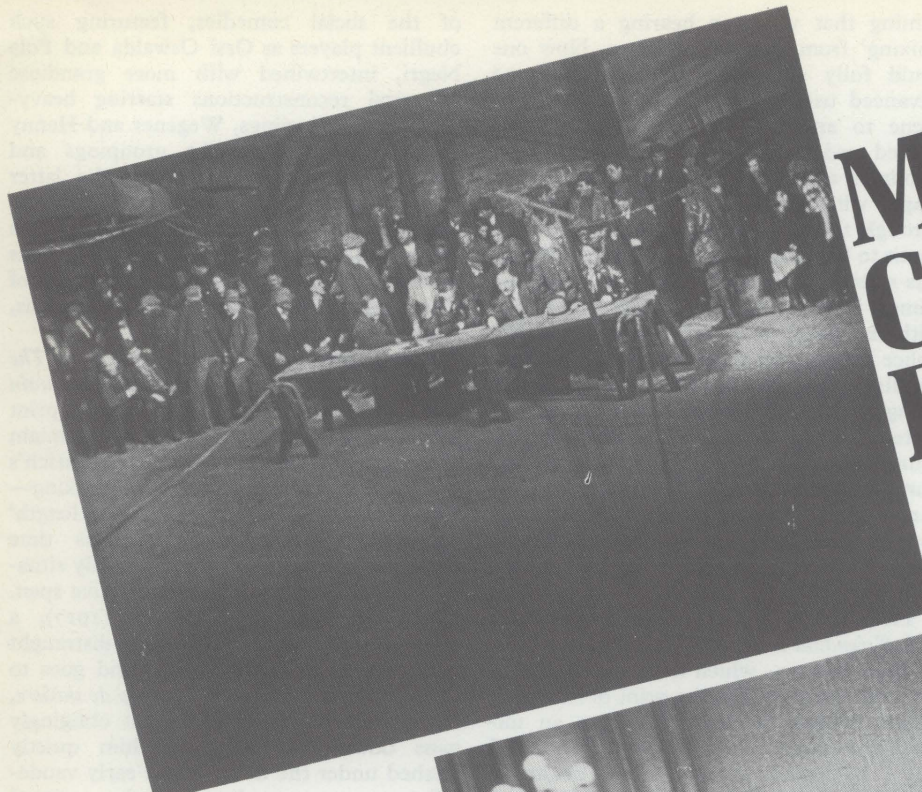
More than 150 people attached to the Congrès Indépendant du Cinéma International attended the opening week of screenings last September of the Munich Film Museum's newly completed auditorium, whose black-décoré basement cinema, cutting rooms and storeroom have been grafted on to the old City Museum in St. Jakobs-Platz. Like most projects of its kind, it was only ready just in time. When Enno Patalas, the Museum's Film Curator (who arranged the week with his wife, critic Frieda Grafe), showed me round on the opening afternoon, they were still putting up the screen; but for Patalas it seemed like a dream come true. When he took over the programming about four years ago, there was no money for film collecting. Now that the new film building has been completed, with the help of funding from both the City Museum and the State, he can turn his attention to building up his own collection from the money available, with assistance from other organisations such as the Bundesarchiv Koblenz. And the new cinema, complete with stereo sound and headphone facilities, has a three-bladed shutter in the projectors which gives an almost flickerless picture at 16 f.p.s. and, miraculously, causes no reduction of light at 24 frames.

Patalas' research methods do not rely on received opinions, unlike those of some of his more academic colleagues. 'After doing a series on the New German Cinema, I thought I would run a programme of German classics. I soon found that the prints I received from other archives were far from satisfactory—bad picture quality, clearly incomplete, and with the wrong kind of inter-titles. So I set myself a task of reconstructing as many as possible, beginning

with the fairly well-known titles we shall be presenting during the week's programmes.' Patalas usually starts his reconstruction work by comparing as many prints of the same film as he can get hold of. Other aids may include the original scenario and the old German censor cards, which are more

like small books, containing all the titles and dialogue lists for films from the 1920s to 1945. Equally important is the authenticity of the inter-titles, which Patalas likes to reproduce when appropriate in the original Gothic lettering.

Detective work of this kind into the silent



Threefold judgment at the climax of the reconstructed 'M'. Pictures by Peter Syr of the Munich Film Museum

film is of course not a new development*, although Patalas seems to be applying more stringent disciplines than many to his investigations. By its very nature, silent cinema was easily open to desecration. Prints could be cut without having to worry about sound continuity, so that distributors simply slashed away whatever they considered to be redundant; inter-titles could be altered to smooth over censorship problems from one country to another. (One recalls how in many prints of Pabst's *Pandora's Box* the lesbian suggestions have been removed by a simple adjustment to both images and title cards.) The confusion is increased by the practice, which in the 20s was quite common, of shooting alternative versions of explicit scenes for domestic and foreign markets. Equally irritating was the contemporary British and American distributors' habit of trying to domesticate continental silent films by altering characters' names, so that Heinrich and Birgit came out as John and Mary.

There is even the problem of knowing what should be regarded as the original or definitive version of a film. Directors did not always have complete control over the final cut. Even so seemingly reliable a source as a release script may be a guide rather than an accurate record; sections may have been cut or altered after shooting; and the collector's desire to assemble the most thorough possible version could, on occasion, result in something longer than the film-maker himself finally arrived at or wanted. The famous case of Ford's *They Were Expendable* comes to mind, and his statement to Lindsay Anderson that he never intended it to run at its final release length of 135 minutes. For admirers of the film, it works very well at this length—its very discursiveness and the in-built theme of 'waiting' seem to need it—but if Ford had really cut it to his requirements, would we have liked it even more?

As far as the sound film is concerned, the quest for original release versions has been helped by television sales and the fact that organisations like the BBC go back wherever possible to the original negatives: witness the number of American films shown on TV in more complete versions (and in better prints) than on their theatrical release. But as we delve further back into film history and the pre-1930 cinema, television is of little use and most of the film-makers themselves are dead—only the artefacts remain and some of the celluloid itself, often on slowly disintegrating nitrate stock and scattered in a score or more centres across the globe. Patalas' approach to the problem seems the only logical one: to reconstruct from the most (seemingly) authentic records available and to hope that knowledge and instinct will result in an approximation of the truth. In the reconstructed versions of films by Lang, Lubitsch and Murnau presented at Munich we saw the first fruits of his programme; already justified by results which were not far short of a revelation.

Fritz Lang's *M* was shown in a very sharp print with exceptionally clear sound, con-

firmed that we were hearing a different 'mixing' from previous versions. Now one could fully appreciate Lang's novel and advanced use of sound overlaps from one scene to another—for instance, the contrasted orders given by both police and criminals alternating over street scenes or maps, with Peter Lorre moving uneasily through the city, unaware that the trap is about to be sprung. But the biggest surprise was reserved for the film's final minute: the climax is now different. Most prints end with the hand on Lorre's shoulder as the police invade the kangaroo court; but now we dissolve to a real court with judgment being given, and then to a final shot of three seated women in mourning clothes. One murmurs: 'We should learn to look after our children more.' The effect now is of three judgments: first by the criminal community, then by the law, and finally by the parents of the victims, directed back to the audience itself.

The version of *Die Nibelungen* (*Siegfried and Kriemhild's Revenge*) ran for nearly six hours at 16 f.p.s., which was a little too slow for some sections. But the print of *Siegfried*, which Patalas had acquired from an undisclosed source, was so magnificent that I felt I had never seen the film before—a stream of beautifully textured images, pin sharp in all the crowd scenes. As in a newly cleaned picture in a gallery, one could now really 'see' the trick and fantasy effects—the deep forest gloom, Ruttman's animated insert of the Dream of Hawks, and the eerie moment when the dwarfs holding the huge crock of treasure are turned to stone. Running the film at this speed conforms to Lang's conception of the action as a kind of immense 'processional'. In this print, the ritualised movements and the overpowering grandeur of the settings seem to call out for a really great music score—not necessarily by Wagner!

The print of *Kriemhild's Revenge* was unfortunately rather dupey (the BFI's cut 35 mm version is visually superior), but made up for this by being more than an hour longer than any other known version. Some of the inserts are small but treasurable moments: Kriemhild digging beneath the snow where Siegfried was killed to secure a handful of the sacred soil; Hagen throwing the treasure into the Rhine, complete with an underwater shot of jewels and bracelets floating to the bottom of the river. Other longer sections included Kriemhild and her entourage setting out across the desert; and the whole apocalyptic climax, with fighting on the ramparts and fire breaking out above, is in this version much more detailed. The vengeful, waiting Kriemhild is seen stationed at various positions outside, and there is a great flurry of shots as the castle disintegrates and Hagen appears to confront his enemies. All kinds of minor additions to this sequence serve to make the characterisations much fuller, with the narrative held tightly together by titles reproduced in their original Gothic lettering.

Early Lubitsch provided the centre-piece of the week, with Patalas filling in most of that hitherto hazy decade up to the time of the director's departure for America in 1923. Lubitsch was an actor in short comedies during the First World War, after which his career divided into two strands: the first

of the social comedies, featuring such ebullient players as Ossi Oswalda and Pola Negri, intertwined with more grandiose historical reconstructions starring heavyweights like Jannings, Wegener and Henny Porten. The tableau-like groupings and theatrically pointed playing of the latter films suggest the influence of Lubitsch's stint as a Reinhardt actor, a period in his life which may also explain his marvellous feeling for décor and his subsequent use of major artists like Kurt Richter, Karl Machus, Ernö Metzner and Ernst Stern.

Apart from such old favourites as *The Oyster Princess* (1919) and *The Mountain Cat* (1921)—the latter seen in a mint print which showed off Stern's snowy mountain décor and gave an added relish to Lubitsch's witty use of screen shapes and masking—we saw some very early 'middle-length' comedies suggesting that at this time Lubitsch was a master of the comedy situation rather than of the long narrative span. Thus, in *The Happy Prison* (1917), a reworking of *Die Fledermaus*, the distraught wife seeking her missing husband goes to the telephone and, in a great *coup de théâtre*, the camera suddenly and most obligingly pans downwards to reveal him quietly sloshed under the desk. These early vaudeville/operetta comedies, mostly scripted with Hans Kraly, invariably feature bands led by frenetic conductors playing in showy ballrooms—years before sound arrived, Lubitsch would seem to have been conceiving musical 'events'.

In *I Wouldn't Like to be a Man* (1918), tomboy Ossi Oswalda does eventually dress up in a dinner jacket and go to the ball, where she is subjected to all kinds of humiliations and improper suggestions; the sly comic innuendoes associated with Lubitsch's American period can easily be traced back to this time, expressed in an even more gusty style. *Romeo and Juliet in the Snow* (1920) is a gleefully coarse rustic comedy about some quarrelsome local Montagus and Capulets, featuring snow scenes, a masked ball with some extremely bizarre headgear, a drunken villager wandering about with angels' wings, and a judge who weighs the claims in a case by putting sausages on the scales. Lubitsch, at this point, is also to be found experimenting with one-shot gags.

Munich's cutting-room and translation staffs were working right up to the time of screening to get ready the two big spectacle films—*The Loves of Pharaoh* (1922) and *Sumurun*, or *One Arabian Night* (1920). The former had presented notably difficult problems; after cans of assorted material had been found in Gosfilmofond, Patalas' staff reconstructed the film from the scenario and discarded or rewrote the often misleading Russian inter-titles. Despite some holes in the narrative, this reconstruction fills an important gap, for here we see Lubitsch's full mastery in handling big crowd scenes (including one stunning shot of a man clambering up a rock pit with hundreds of figures seen in deep focus far below), as well as the persistent Reinhardt influence making itself felt in grandiose interior design and intense, ritualistic acting. It is the kind of film where one would dearly like to stop the projector and pick down individual images from the screen.

The same could be said of *Sumurun*, and

*The Swedish Film Institute has recently produced a superb tinted print of Christensen's *Häxan* (*Witchcraft Through the Ages*, 1921).

here the print was visually impeccable, if not quite complete in narrative. Gorgeous desert imagery, a much more airy and open décor (Richter and Metzner) and wonderfully luminous photography made the palace grounds and the little twisty town below, with its sun-drenched minarets and bridges, look as if the shadow of Caligari had just passed by. (The great Theodor Sparkuhl was Lubitsch's regular cameraman at the time, and followed him to America.) Based on the Reinhardt pantomime-ballet in which both Pola Negri and Lubitsch had appeared on the stage, *Sumurun* was clearly subjected to much adaptation, taking most of it out of doors and offering Lubitsch opportunities for a complex *mise en scène* of balletic movements interspersed with comic interludes featuring a chorus of eunuchs and a perky parade of serving girls. It also reflects the crueller aspects of the Arabian Nights stories, not least in Lubitsch's own rather excessive performance as an anguished hunchbacked clown.

But the week's most unexpected surprise came with an extremely rare Murnau film of 1923, *The Finances of the Grand Duke*. The print has clearly been made up from several sources and is still missing some fairly fundamental scenes, but its sporadic progress and Italian flash-titles perhaps added to the fun of a story which seemed to involve shaky grand-ducal finances, stolen letters, ladies in distress and the exploits of a rather thuggish gang with a midget among their number. In its use of real locations

(sunny Mediterranean towns and harbours) as a background to these mysterious goings-on, the film looked as though Murnau was paying homage to Feuillade. The bizarre moments of shock—an ape on a rope swinging across a room to surprise a visitor, sudden disappearances behind doors—also recalled the master; as did some decidedly quirky characterisation, with a very good-natured performance by Mady Christians as the lady on the run, being made up by the hero to look ugly and so evade her pursuers. Equally fascinating was the early appearance of a genuine built-up Murnau city, all flashing lights, scurrying streetcars and busy hotel foyers, in this case looking not back towards Feuillade but forward towards *The Last Laugh*, which Murnau was to make immediately afterwards.

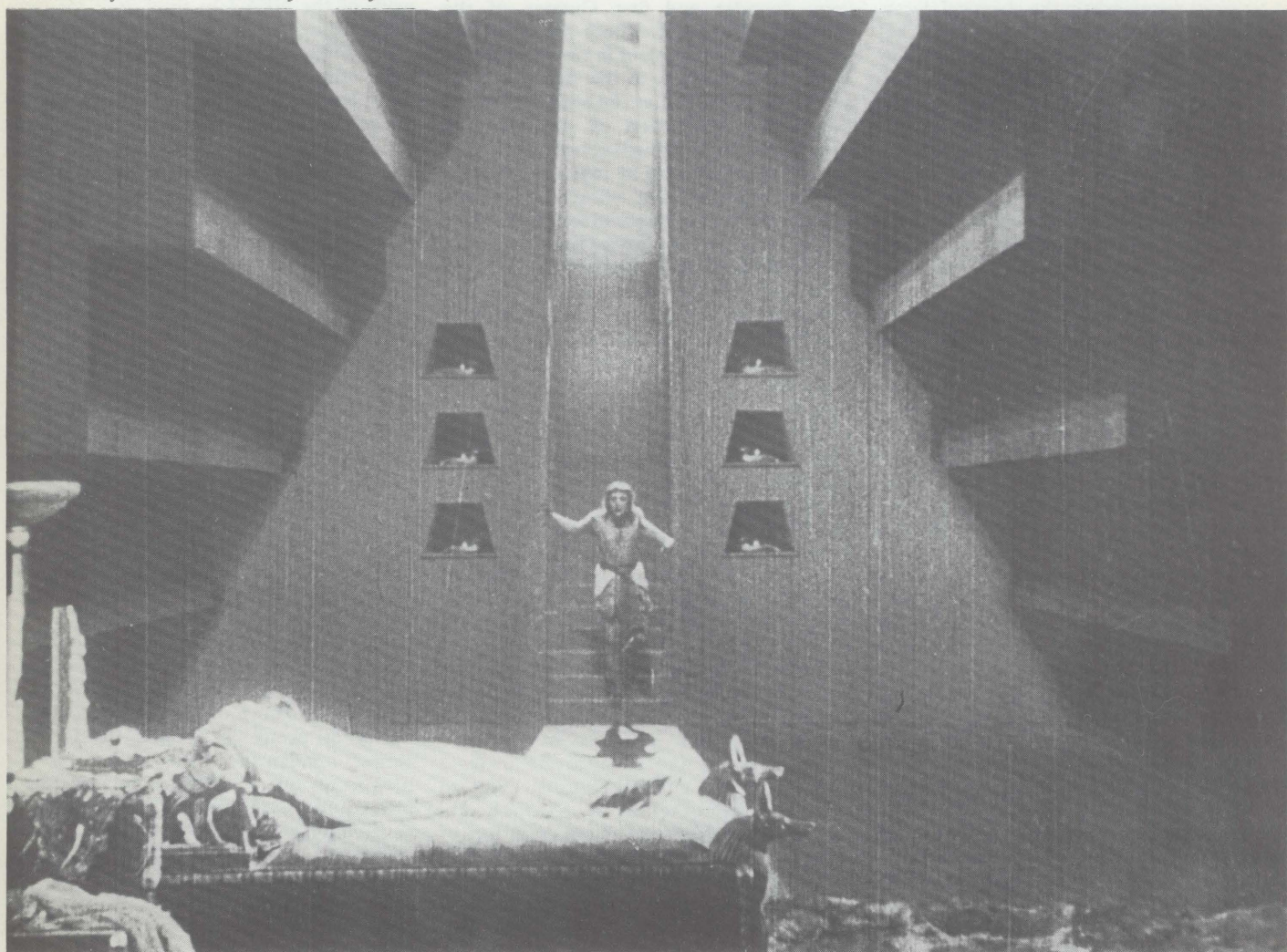
Interspersed through the week's programmes were a series of shorts by Karl Valentin, the Munich-based comedian who worked in films from about 1912 to the middle 30s. Valentin is a lanky, drooping, thin-legged figure, with an outrageously turned-up nose and an air of never knowing quite what he is about. His early shorts are gentle and unhurried; comparisons with Keaton are not entirely out of place for this much more local comedian. Like Keaton, he can be disturbed by inanimate objects—one short shows him busily cutting down a desk and chair to fit his awkward length—and his fingers seem to be always stuck in pots and inkwells. Although Valentin is probably best known as the dilapidated circus director in Ophüls' *The Bartered Bride*, an earlier

featurette, *The Mysteries of a Hairdresser's Salon* (1922), directed by Erich Engel and Bertolt Brecht (no less), gives a much richer idea of his talent. Here he plays a wily, sadistic barber in an exceptionally chaotic shop, who accidentally detaches a customer's head while shaving him but solves the problem by sticking it back with plaster and giving it a little pat to make sure it is secure. The film, in its way, looks forward to the grotesqueries of the Soviet FEKS group or a French satire like *L'Affaire est dans le Sac*.

A day after the Munich Week ended, Enno Patalas tested his stereo equipment with a newly discovered print of *Lola Montès* in the German version. Future plans include work on several more German classics—*The Last Laugh*, Lubitsch's *Die Flamme* (Montmartre), which exists at present only in a 30-minute fragment, and *Nosferatu*, and here Patalas has already unearthed several scenes unavailable in other versions. The archaeology of cinema is now with us as a fully fledged science; but to paraphrase Kevin Brownlow, the Parade Went By a long time ago. Without being unduly pessimistic, it seems certain that only urgent action can now save what remains—and that means more general understanding of the problems, and more money and facilities from state and private sources everywhere. ■

I would like to thank David Meeker for supplying certain technical information for this article.

'The Loves of Pharaoh'. Picture by Peter Syr



NITRATE

Clyde
Jeavons

It is a perpetual source of wonderment to film archivists—wonderment tinged with horror—that the film industry (not to mention public health and safety authorities) tolerated the use of nitrate film in cinemas and laboratories for so long. Yet despite the apparent existence of a satisfactory (though evidently more costly) 35 mm safety film stock, this volatile, explosively inflammable, virtually inextinguishable and—in the early stages of its combustion—highly toxic material survived for 55 years (i.e. the first two-thirds of the cinema's history to date) as the carrier of the commercial film industry's prolific product, before being superseded in 1951 by something safer.

Fortunately, the first film archives recognised early on the need to keep nitrate films in stringently safe conditions—on remote sites, in temperature-controlled vaults—while they set about the task of finding, salvaging and preserving the world's often neglected and abused film culture heritage; and their record in this respect has been impeccable. But there is one thing even the cleverest film technician cannot do, and that is to arrest permanently the chemical decay, the almost diabolical 'self-destruct' mechanism, to which nitrate is subject from the day it is manufactured. In its advanced stages, this deterioration takes the form of stickiness accompanied by a pungent smell, followed by a complete loss of image and, finally, degeneration into a dry brown powder, rather like snuff or rust. A simple chemical test, devised for film preservation work, can anticipate the onset of instability, as nitrate decay is known, and thus give the archivist time to prepare the threatened film for duplication. However, nitrate film has a secondary adverse property, namely a tendency to shrink as it ages, making duplication by conventional means intensely difficult if not impossible.

Broadly speaking, nitrate film has a minimum useful life of 25 years, and it has been calculated that its average lifespan before final decay sets in is no more than 50 years. (One exceptional film stock manufactured during World War II was found—in time, luckily, as far as the National Film Archive collection was concerned—to have a deterioration rate of twice this norm.) Good storage conditions can delay the arrival of conclusive decay but cannot reverse it.

On the basis of the foregoing facts and figures, it requires no mathematical genius to calculate that a major portion of the world's cinema is still on nitrate stock; that without the existence of archives devoted to its preservation, a massive amount of this cinema would already be lost; and that if the film archive movement collapsed tomorrow, the survival of the remainder could not be guaranteed beyond the year 2000 and much would be lost long before then. This assumes—correctly, judging by past experience—

that the film industry itself would take minimal steps to save more than the relatively few films reckoned to have commercial viability.

Two significant events have dramatised the nitrate situation in the past five years, in Britain at least. The first was an out of the blue injunction by the Home Office in the early 70s to the effect that all nitrate film should be summarily removed from premises where people either lived or worked in close proximity to it, i.e. film laboratories, film company vaults—anywhere, in fact, beyond the two recognised archives (the NFA and the Imperial War Museum) and one or two approved commercial vaults. The result of this hasty edict was, on the one hand, a sudden flood of offers by film companies, after years of desultory indifference, to donate their wares to the National Film Archive, and on the other, a frantic bid by the Archive to rescue the large residue of films either no longer owned by an extant company or not offered to the Archive, and threatened with sudden mass junking. The late Ernest Lindgren, founder and first Curator of the National Film Archive, once predicted that the full scale use of colour in cinematography would lead, literally, to the death of black and white films, just as the arrival of sound caused the destruction of shelf-loads of silent films fifty years ago (nobody celebrated that black anniversary in 1977). So far, this has not happened, but neither he nor any other archivist was prepared for the sentence of death so suddenly placed on nitrate film.

The second significant event sprang partly from the first. The NFA's holdings of nitrate film—even with the application of its catholic but careful selection procedures—had grown by 1976 to an awesome 120 million feet; to a point, in fact, at which—if the then budgeted rate of duplication on to safety stock continued—four-fifths of the collection would potentially be lost by the turn of the century. Happily (and the full implications of this in terms of British socio-cultural attitudes to film as an art and arts subsidy in general have not yet been properly spelled out), the Department of Education and Science—the British Film Institute's funding body—responded favourably to a detailed plea by the BFI and NFA to commence the financing of a 24-year programme of nitrate duplication which would ultimately save the national collection.

A suitable sum was added to the BFI's 1976/77 budget and an adequate increase awarded in the current financial year to help to accelerate the scheme up to the necessary duplicating rate of five million feet of nitrate film per year. In effect, there is a commitment now to spend (at present prices) something in excess of 14 million pounds in nitrate duplication over the full 24-year programme.

Putting aside for a moment the practical problems of sorting, examining, testing, repairing and printing 120,000 reels of nitrate film, plus the ever-presence of a relatively small but significant amount of nitrate still sitting in collections outside the Archive, it can be said with some degree of confidence that Britain, at least, is on the way to solving this particular aspect of its film archiving problems. And the benefits are already apparent. Many films which previously lay dormant in the NFA, particularly those relating to British cinema, have now become available through the Archive's Viewing Service and showings at the National Film Theatre. The careers of Hitchcock, Saville, Korda, Cavalcanti, and other luminaries of British film-making, could not be fully re-assessed without these radical changes in the nature of the National Film Archive's work. Nor could the pioneer British cinema have emerged as it is now doing as demonstrably one of the main influences on early film form.

But what is the position vis-à-vis nitrate in other countries, particularly in relation to the work of the NFA? In brief, it is far from clear. First of all, it has to be noted that the NFA differs in one important respect from most other recognised film archives: it is much broader in scope and aims, and regards the non-fiction film (or rather, film as historical record in all its various guises) as no less important than the feature film or the film as art or entertainment. In general, the rest of the world's archives and cinémathèques are concerned emphatically with the latter, often to the exclusion of record film. The principal exceptions—such as the Imperial War Museum and the German Bundesarchiv—are specialist archives and concerned with feature films only in a marginal sense. Thus the NFA, as well as bearing the full burden of preserving British cinema, has (and rightly so) taken on also the responsibility for the wealth of non-fiction film (newsreels, documentaries, propaganda films, advertising films, home movies *et al*) which—the British being a peerless nation of hoarders—has survived in this country, plus examples of important foreign record film which it feels would otherwise not have been preserved at all.

From an archival point of view it can be argued that historical record film is even more important than the feature film: for while the commercial nature of the latter (the multiplicity of prints, its public distribution) almost accidentally helps it to survive, non-fiction film is largely non-commercial, printed in small quantities, limited in its distribution and generally far more likely to disappear or never even emerge in the first place. The newsreel tradition, in particular, has been stronger in Britain than perhaps any other country, and still there are two large and important nitrate newsreel collec-

tions—Pathé and Movietone—outside the care of the Archive and into which their owners seem unwilling to plunge the funds necessary to save them from self-destruction. (Moves to resolve this problem in a different but related case by relatively cheap transfer to videotape met with massive resistance by the chief users of non-fiction film—TV producers, historical researchers and so on—largely because of the drastic loss of picture quality and practical handling problems, and this does not at present seem to be an acceptable solution.) And many would argue that the very nature of newsreel output (its intrinsic ideology, its implicitly biased reflection of historical events) demands that the major collections be preserved *in toto*.

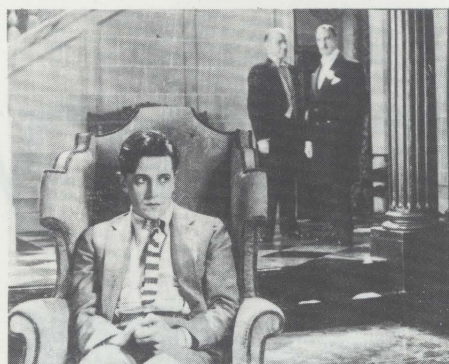
Britain, too, partly for reasons of language and the feebleness of its own cinema identity, has arguably been more influenced socially and culturally by Hollywood-American cinema than any other European country, and therefore correctly and inevitably has taken on some of the responsibility for saving and preserving American films. If this seems odd or unfair, one has only to cite, at random, Cecil B. DeMille's *Maria Rosa* (1916), *Hollywood Revue of 1929*, *The Black Pirate* and numerous early Biographs and Vitaphones, all as examples of American films saved and restored by the NFA, to see the significance of this part of the Archive's work.

The converse to all this is that, broadly speaking, the non-British archives, by restricting their worries and responsibility to the cultural cinema product of their own country, are concerned with far smaller quantities of nitrate film. At the same time, however, the aims and scale of funding can vary so greatly in each case that it is difficult to see a clear pattern or detect a coherent international policy, notwithstanding the important presence of the long-established International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF). Thus while, for example, the affluent Swedish Film Archive has its duplication problem more or less licked, and the American preservation archives (the Library of Congress, the Museum of Modern Art, Eastman House) appear able to cope at least with American cinema, there are serious uncertainties elsewhere, without even mentioning the more extreme examples such as the French Cinémathèque which, under Henri Langlois, appeared to abandon the notion of permanent preservation altogether.

The established West European archives—Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Toulouse, Norway, Finland, and so on—operate neatly and well and without special alarm within their comfortable, indigenous parameters. But it is equally evident that (for example) Israel cannot cope financially with the two small but vital newsreel collections which have recently come to light there; that the three Italian archives (in Rome, Milan and Turin) have always struggled to save their prodigious cinema heritage (to the extent that Britain's collection of Italian primitive cinema, widely distributed in the UK during the early silent period, appears richer than Italy's); that traditions of film archiving (and thus the survival of its films) are virtually non-existent in South America and a constant prey to political upheaval where attempts have been made to establish them; and that Japan, despite the monumental reputation of its cinema, barely has a film archive at all. In some countries, such as

India, Spain, Portugal, Mexico, China and North Korea, while film archives certainly exist there, it is difficult to ascertain the extent of their commitment to preservation, particularly in relation to pre-1950 cinema.

The Eastern bloc presents somewhat different problems—not so much of finance and resources, since archiving is usually directly linked with state-controlled production, and Russia and East Germany, for example, have some of the finest preservation facilities in the world, but rather of communication, co-operation and understanding the Communist countries' priorities. Co-operation is a two-way problem, in so far as the NFA is heavily restricted by industry veto as to what British or American films it can offer to (for instance)



Nitrate prints uniquely preserved (and in the case of *'Hollywood Revue'* restored) by the NFA. Buster Keaton in *'Hollywood Revue of 1929'*; Ivor Novello in Hitchcock's *'Downhill'* (1927); Elissa Landi in Anthony Asquith's *'Underground'* (1928)

Russia by way of exchange, while a number of Russian films (e.g. *The Fall of Berlin* and the agitprop newsreels of Dziga Vertov) are simply unavailable to Western archives. There is clear evidence also that (again) Russia has significantly re-edited some of its acknowledged classics for historical/ideological reasons, putting a further burden of preservation responsibility on the West. At the same time, East European priorities tend to put the imported early cinema of other countries at the back of the preservation queue, and unless a Western archive can find out about and specifically request such films for itself, there is a very real danger that surviving copies of films which have disappeared in the West may rot away in an East European archive.

To be fair, there are signs that this latter problem, at least, may be easing. Thanks to a strong plea by David Francis, Curator of the NFA, at the 1977 International Congress of FIAF—not the first plea of its kind by any means, but the first to get a real response—there are moves at last towards the establishment of a central register of archive holdings. Only in this way—only by honest divulgence by all archives of the films they hold (not only titles, but also gauge, length, condition, etc.)—can needless and costly duplication be avoided and the lost films of each nation come home to roost. At present, and with some good sense, the emphasis is on nitrate holdings, and already there has been a healthy exchange of lists between some Western archives, notably Britain and the United States, followed by agreement to return to their country of origin a number of nitrate films so that the preservation work on them can correctly and logically be carried out at that country's expense.

The most significant list so far, perhaps, has come from Czechoslovakia—a schedule of nitrate prints of Russian, American, German, Italian, Austrian and French feature-length films, mostly of the 20s (though some earlier) which the Czech Archive 'does not intend to transfer to acetate stock within the coming ten years.' The NFA's experience of co-operation with Czechoslovakia over the years (an exceptionally good one, despite earlier generalisations) has revealed the remarkable richness of the Czech Archive, which assiduously acquired and kept all the examples of world cinema which entered its country and has more than once been the source of a lost British or American film (albeit with Czech titles). The American films alone on the Czechs' nitrate list number over 80 titles. Until this has been checked in detail, it is impossible to say what proportion of these have failed to survive in the West, but more important is the readiness of an archive of this kind to enter into this form of essential international co-operation.

An English film critic, writing about the Archive, recently asked with a felicitously dramatic turn of phrase: 'Will you still be able to see 1984 in 2001?' The answer in Britain, thanks to an increasing awareness in public and official as well as culturally aware circles of the importance of the national film collection, is now a confident 'Yes'. The answer elsewhere is less certain, perhaps. But there can no longer be any doubt in the minds of the world's film archivists that international co-operation is the only way to prevent nitrate film becoming all too literally a burning question.

Now well into his eighties—he was born in Christianburg, Virginia, in 1892—and able to look back upon more than half a century of involvement with the cinema, Henry King is still a remarkably active man, still planning pictures. In fact, as he sits in his office chair in an erect (almost military) posture, his piercing gaze never wavering, Mr. King gives an initial impression of being rather a daunting subject to interview. Until, that is, one experiences the sheer enthusiasm with which he talks about making movies. Above all, his conversation convinces that the film-making process is a marvellous, collaborative adventure. More so in the pioneering days, of course, but the amazing thing about Henry King is that it has never ceased to be an adventure. Masterpieces like *Tol'able David* and *Stella Dallas*, the magical qualities of *Margie*, *The Gunfighter* and *Wait Till the Sun Shines*, *Nellie*, testify to his mastery of film form. But his films also express an uncommonly wide range of emotions, and an affection for people that is probably his surest strength as a director. For too long ignored in favour of the more fashionable of his contemporaries, King seems only recently to be receiving the attention that his long and eminent career deserves, including a recent, major season of his films at the National Film Theatre.

The following interview was begun in June at Mr. King's office in Hollywood and completed in August at the Savoy Hotel, London.

Beginnings

My father was a farmer. His father was a plantation owner. I knew that I would have some other sort of career because I hated farming. I don't know whether my interest in Americana came from this; it came inherently probably, but unconsciously. I left school to join a repertory company called the Empire Stock Company. And they played everything, even a version of *Jekyll and Hyde*—I didn't do *Jekyll* or *Hyde* but I did play the doctor. I put a moustache and a goatee on my teenage face, and it was a grand experience because most of the players were professional actors, they would have a repertoire of maybe ten or twenty plays—and I had nothing. I'd graduate into learning this play, then that play; sometimes I'd have to get up as many as two plays in a week.

At one time I took a job with a circus. It was in the South—I wanted to go North and that way I got a free ride. That was Johnny Jones' Dog and Pony Show. Really, I played everything imaginable: circus, repertory,

vaudeville, burlesque. In burlesque, they used to have these one-act plays, very short skits. There was one show where I think I played eight or nine different parts; you'd go off and change, stick on a moustache and go back and do something else. And then in the olio [a speciality act presented between scenes or acts, often used to gain time to change scenery] I used to do a burlesque of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with a man called Denton. I would run off the stage and slip a black stocking over my head that had two holes in

David Badder

Interview with Henry King

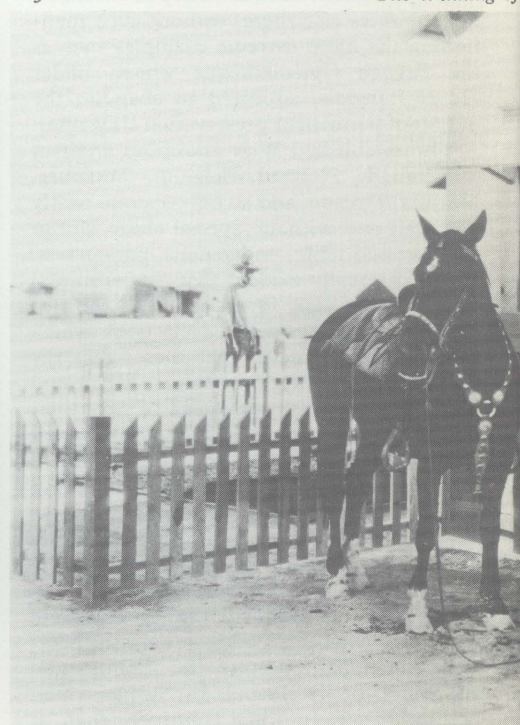


'At one time I took a job with a circus . . .' Henry Fonda in 'Chad Hanna' (1940)



'My interest in Americana . . .':

'The Winning of'



it—that would make me black, you see. I'd run on the stage in ragged clothes and he'd holler, 'Come here, Tom, you belong to me body and soul.' I'd reply, 'Yessir, massuh, my body may belong to you but my soul . . . ' 'What of your soul?' 'My soul belongs to the A.B.C. Brewing Company'—and black-out. Whatever town you were in you'd name the brewing company, and they'd always come around and give everybody in the company a handful of beer checks.

Anyway, by the time I was nineteen I was directing. I had been on the road for 43 weeks in *The House of a Thousand Candles*; the show closed and I went into Chicago to the College Theatre, where they were putting on stock. The first bill was *The House of a Thousand Candles*. So the man started directing it, doing everything completely different from the way I'd been accustomed; and I kept saying you don't do it that way. So he said, 'Why don't you direct it yourself?' So I went and put the show on and it went just as smooth as could be. I played in one more thing there and then I went to Flint, Michigan; and when I got there I found they'd engaged me as an actor and a stage director. I said this is ridiculous—but I was there and somebody had to do it.

Lubin and Balboa

I came into pictures by accident. I had been having dinner in New York with Pearl White, the serial star of *The Perils of Pauline*, and a Mrs. Hamilton, the daughter of a man who owned a repertory theatre I'd been with. I'd met her through Pearl and she was going over to the Putnam Building, which was where the Paramount Theatre now stands, for an interview for motion pictures. I escorted her over and stood outside; there were about fifty people waiting to see this man. So finally she came out with this producer and introduced me. He said, 'Have you ever tried motion pictures?' I said, 'No, I can't. I have blue eyes.' He said, 'Oh, that's old-fashioned, we overcame that problem years ago.' So I went back next day to talk with him, he offered me

\$35 a week, I accepted and came to Philadelphia.

It was one of those sub-franchises, the man I worked for made pictures for the Lubin people. They were making three-reelers; we'd make one about every week or ten days, something like that. I did about two or three, but there was always so much time to wait: you'd work from nine until eleven and then you didn't have anything more to do until two; or maybe you wouldn't start until twelve and work until four. You couldn't work after four-thirty depending upon the time of year, and if the sun wasn't shining you couldn't work at all, because they didn't have lights and had to have bright sunlight. So I started writing: I had been through so many plays I would take a little bit from one play, a little from another, put it together and ask them if they liked the story. That's the way I got my first writing done. I kept on writing until I got in touch—I don't remember how—with a man from Balboa Films.

Balboa were in Long Beach, California. That was in 1916. They offered me a greater field, an opportunity to do bigger pictures. Five-reelers were very seldom made at that time. I'd only been there a couple of weeks but I hadn't seen any salary at all—it just didn't come through, they didn't have any. But psychologically they thought if he's working he won't worry about his salary. So they let you do a lot of things they wouldn't ordinarily have done. I remembered when I was in my teens being in Abingdon, Virginia and waiting for a train. There was a train standing there going East; there was a boy standing holding the rail at the end of the train and a girl standing about two feet away from him. And there was such tragedy written on those two faces that I just stood and watched them; each one had so much to say that they would both start to talk at once and it ended up with neither of them saying anything. Finally, the bell of the train started to ring, she jumped forward and he came forward and they gave each other one of those

peck kisses; then she turned and ran through a little park and never looked back while the train pulled out. Well, that night, this train crashed going through the Shenandoah Valley and over twenty students were killed and he was one of them. The girl, a couple of days later, committed suicide. And the tragedy of those two people always stuck in my mind.

So I decided to write a story making that the basis—only I had the girl live and the boy reported killed but he was not; and she had a baby that she raised believing the father was dead. Since Balboa weren't paying me they said, 'That sounds pretty good, go ahead and make it.' I made it in three reels, there was no front title on the film and at the end of it the title came up—*Who Pays?* A tragedy, unfinished, everything hanging in the air. Now who pays—the child, the mother, the father—who? That was my first piece of directing. I'd done a fight scene earlier on; that was because everybody always copied the Tom Sanchez fight in an old picture, *The Spoilers*. I said to the director, 'Let's do this one differently.' He told me to write it down in detail, and then he read it and said, 'This is just a mess of scenes.' But he let me direct the fight and I had to help cut it. I went to the cutter and said, 'You cut it right there.' She said, 'But that's only six or seven inches, no motion picture scene should be less than three feet.' I said, 'Is that a rule, a law? A scene should be long enough to tell what it is going to say; anything more is dead wood.' In the end, she put it together the way I wanted and it was a big success.

Balboa sold *Who Pays?* to Pathé, who wanted a series of six—I didn't direct the others but I played in them with Ruth Roland, and all of them had tragic endings. After that I made a picture with Baby Marie Osborn, who came from a carnival family. I found her in the studio restaurant one day, got on well with her and suggested the idea to Dan Whitcomb, a newspaper man then writing for films. We made this picture—*Little Mary Sunshine*—and it was a sensation. Pathé wanted a series of six pictures

Barbara Worth (1926)



'Now what bigger story . . . ' Jeanne Crain in 'Margie' (1940)



'with Henry King and that baby'; Dan wrote most of them—*Once Upon a Time*, *Joy* and *the Dragon*—with me acting and directing. With these pictures Balboa came right up to the top again. I left to go to the American Film Company; six months later the sheriff put the padlock on Balboa and it never opened again.

American; Ince; Inspiration

One of my first pictures at American, *The Woman in Black*, caused quite a controversy. It was around the beginning of 1918, and there was a German officer in it who was made a very sympathetic character. Jules Furthman, who had written the story, was slapped off to training camp within a week. I was drafted too, but they gave me a preference because they wanted pictures; put me in Class 2A and I stayed in that all through, never went in the service at all. My biggest success was probably *Six Feet Four*, which I shot entirely on location in Cruze Canyon. It was from a book by Jackson Gregory which I bought and the studio took over and it made a long feature for that time, 5,800 feet, but when it played in greater New York it recouped all its negative cost. Everything it made outside New York was profit. But it went to all of their heads; I was now at the Ince studio and they came over to get me back to make some more big pictures. I had an obligation there so I didn't go, but they hired another director, started in making these big pictures, made two and found they couldn't get a release. They closed the doors and never opened them again.

I only made one picture for Tom Ince. In making the contract I had persuaded him to break his rule that a director could not go into the cutting room or work with the cutter. I had told him, 'If I make a picture and somebody else assembles it not exactly as I made it, you might as well get anybody to direct the picture. The value I am to you is in giving you what I had in mind, not just a strip of film.' He agreed and I made *23½ Hours Leave* while he was away on his yacht.

There was a business manager at the studio who had been an efficiency expert at the Packard automobile company—he didn't feel right unless everything ran like nuts and bolts. He resented the fact that I was going into the cutting room and I knew he wasn't going to exercise my option. So by the time he told me this fact I was able to tell him I'd already signed on some place else. I met Mr. Ince one more time; it was when *Tol'able David* was running in New York. When I have a picture running in a theatre I sometimes go to see it, just to see what the audience likes and what they don't like. My wife and I were walking out when Tom Ince caught me by the shoulder. He told me that when he returned from his holiday, he had gone straight to the studio at ten o'clock at night and run the picture. 'There and then I made great plans for Henry King and the big pictures I was going to make. When I found out what had happened I was so mad I didn't know what to do.'

The heads of First National had seen *23½ Hours Leave* and they wanted me to make pictures for them. So I accepted the deal at Inspiration Pictures, which was financed by the Harriman Bank, though a man called Charlie Duell handled it for them. I made a series of pictures there: we started with

\$250,000 and ended with assets of over \$6 million after only six pictures. I didn't have a position in the company—I just did everything. I was producer, director, I was head of the scenario department, I was business manager, head of casting. But I had some people to rely upon. We took space at the Biograph studios. I kept expenses down.

Our contract with First National was that when we delivered a picture they would give us \$125,000 advance on the negative, thinking the negative would have cost \$200,000 or maybe \$250,000, and then they would own 50 per cent of the picture. Well, when we collected the advance on our first picture, *Tol'able David*, I had only physically spent \$86,000; on top of that we had overheads which consumed a great deal, but we made maybe \$10,000 profit on the negative. Then the picture went out and grossed a million and some odd dollars the first time around. And we did that with all the others.

Duell asked me one day what I would think about making a picture with Lillian Gish. I told him the first thing you have to think about with an actress like that is getting a story that suits her—something like *The White Sister*, the play made from a book by Marion Crawford, would be ideal. We bought the property and went to Italy to make it. The first time I had ever been out of the United States and I made every scene in Italy out of a studio there. It worked out very well, and I spent such a little amount of money on the picture. First National thought I'd spent a million dollars, but it only cost \$278,000. Of course, I'd used real locations and had things that people had never seen before: I had the inside of a volcano, for instance. I found Ronald Colman for that picture. But that's a famous story. The way I found Ernest Torrence for *Tol'able David* is less well known.

Ernest had never been in a picture; he was a dancer, a singer, a pianist and a comedian. I was casting for the film, looking for someone to play Richard Barthelmess' father, a Virginia farmer, and they brought in David Torrence, Ernest's brother. I told David I thought he looked more like a British banker than a Virginia farmer. But Ernest had come over with David, just for the trip, and I told him I'd like to talk with him. Now nobody

knew I was going to put a third bad man into the picture; that was never in the scenario. Later, I was trying to explain to Ernest the character of Luke Hatburn; the type of mind this man has, his idea of fun would be: he's trying to get to his cousin's house and he sees a cat sleeping in the sun and he thinks wouldn't it be funny to get a big stone, throw it on the cat and see the blood and guts splatter. That's the worst type of killer you can get, that type of man. We get down to Virginia and we're sitting on the porch one evening, and a man went by in the damndest clothes I'd ever seen on a person. I said to Ernest, 'There goes Luke Hatburn, he even walks like him.' Ernest just got up and walked down the street, came back about half an hour later with the clothes on. I asked him what he did with the body. Some time later Ernest reminded me of my story about the cat, so I put a cat in a scene, only we worked it out so that Luke's idiot brother bumped him and knocked the stone out of his hand. *Tol'able David* was shot about sixty miles from where I was born in Montgomery County, Virginia—a lot of my boyhood days went into it.

Goldwyn and Zanuck

With Goldwyn it was a partnership, I had a percentage which proved to be very profitable. I got along with Sam very well. He liked publicity and got it because he was good copy; he had such idiosyncrasies. Sam bought *Stella Dallas* and he determined that I was the man that had to make it. He went to my lawyer who happened to be his lawyer and eventually we agreed to terms. My lawyer told me one thing about Sam, though. He said, 'Sam Goldwyn will do anything in the world that he signs his name to, but don't pay any attention to any of the promises he makes that are not in writing.' Some time later, Sam came to me crying. He'd just seen some rushes on *Stella Dallas* (the scene where Stella gives a birthday party for her daughter and no one shows up). He said, 'It's the most beautiful scene I've ever seen in my life; I've never seen anything like this in pictures.' Which showed me that the man did have a soft heart.

I would say that Darryl Zanuck was the

The Balboa Studio at Long Beach (originally the Edison Studio) in 1916



last of the big tycoons, the last of the big studio head producers. He used to speak of the responsibility this meant: 'Henry, we have 3,400 people at this studio, it's my responsibility for these people to know that they have a job and that it's permanent. So that's where you come in, we share the responsibility to give audiences substantial entertainment. We're not going to give them a lot of doctrines, we're making pictures to keep the theatres open and not to sell a lot of patent medicine.' Zanuck was one of the most constructive men I've worked with; we never had any hesitation about asking each other's opinion about things.

Margie was an example. One day Darryl called and told me he had a very good script, but he wasn't sure it had the substance to make a feature picture. I read it and told him that not only did I think there was enough material but that I would like to make the picture. I said: 'Don't you get it, this picture has the biggest situation in it that I've seen in any picture since *Wilson*. When Mr. and Mrs. Wilson left the Capitol, to me it was tragedy. This picture is just the reverse, it has something even bigger. Darryl, your little daughter Darrylyn, let's imagine, has been raised with her grandmother and never been allowed to see her father and she's dying to put her arms round him, and him the same, but they've been kept apart. Now the emergency arises when the old lady has to send for the father to come to escort the girl to the prom. Now what bigger story...' He said, 'I never got it, I didn't get it at all.'

Preparation and Screenwriting

To me preparation is as important as the making. Because I make the picture two or three times before I ever turn the camera. For example, one day Darryl called me: 'I have a story here I have kept for you. It's been made into three scripts, and I've combined them into one. I've worked with it until I'm tired of it—if you like it, make it your next production; if you don't like it, throw it in the waste paper basket.' That was *Twelve O'Clock High*. I read it and told him that I liked the story but not the script. He said, 'What I'd like you to do is get completely away from the studio where no one can bother you and get the script the way you want it and then I'd like to read it.' First of all I went scouting locations. I went to New Jersey, to the Pentagon building for background information; I remember that Shamroy, the cameraman, and I flew across Florida five times in one day in my *Bonanza*. When we got those set, I took Sy Bartlett and hid out in a little place by the sea. And in one week we had the script. It was the same with *Jesse James* where I went off by myself, and with *Captain from Castile*, which I did with Lamar Trotti, and lots of others.

I always managed to have some time with the scriptwriter. But I would much prefer the man who is going to construct the script to go through and make the first draft, because that gives him an uninterrupted view of the way he sees the story. Then we sit down together and go through it scene by scene; sometimes we add, sometimes we eliminate. It's sort of a reconstructive method to get all the ingredients. Because my feeling is that if you read a book you may get one thing out of it, but I may get



A 1930 view of Fox Movietone Studios, which in 1935 became 20th Century Fox

another. Now which is the most important, your viewpoint or mine? And which is the most important pictorially, because, after all, it is a different medium. The idea of putting it down on paper is one thing but putting it on film is entirely different. The truly professional scriptwriter wants your help; after all they're getting credit for the script. Someone like Nunnally Johnson or Lamar Trotti would discuss with you and somewhere out of your conversation he would get a little idea. He would take this away and make something great out of it, something I would never have seen.

It's the same with actors. Some people don't give an actor a chance to do his or her best work, because they are driving so hard for the story. I mean that you can't rebuild a man; if he has certain characteristics you can't destroy them and take them away. The thing you're after is to take these characteristics and mould them into the picture so that they seem made for it. Now Tyrone Power had great possibilities, but for some reason or another everyone else that made a picture with him tried to *make* him strong and he came over as weak as water. All you had to do to get strength out of Ty was just to quiet him down and let him *be* strong. There's different kinds of strength, there's one that's forced and there's one that's real—and you have to find the real one... What you've got to remember is making motion pictures is fun, it's lots of fun.

Techniques and Technicians

Every scene must have something to say and if you make it obvious you might as well not say it. It's this connected with that—like a mosaic. Right from the beginning I supervised the editing of my films all the way through to the final cut. Barbara McLean was my editor at Fox for well over twenty years; I'd run the rushes every day with her and, after I'd been shooting a week and we had enough material, she would put a sequence together and run it at the end of that day's rushes. Then once a week I'd take Barbara to a restaurant quite close by the studio, have dinner and afterwards go back to the studio and project until about ten or thirty. We'd talk about what we'd got and make suggestions. As the picture got further along I'd do this twice a week. So that ten days after we've quit shooting I'm ready to show the picture as a completed project.

Leon Shamroy, in my mind, was the best cameraman of all. He would follow behind

me and see me rehearse. I would rehearse for a long time and then give the location or set to him to begin setting up his lighting. Then I'd rehearse again and afterwards Shamroy would come back to put his stand-ins in. Finally, I'd come back for one more rehearsal, Shamroy would touch up his lights a little bit and then we would shoot. I had a scene in *Twelve O'Clock High* which was a great test for Shamroy, the scene where Gregory Peck receives Hugh Marlowe and berates him for his negative attitude, virtually calls him a coward. It was one continuous shot running about seven minutes. Zanuck saw this and said he would never cut it. I said, 'You have nothing to cut it to—I didn't make one close-up.'

Now Charlie Clarke is a top cameraman, but there's only one man can tell the story; it must pass through one man, the director, because there's such a thing as an atmosphere in which the story must be told. Take the scene in *Margie* in the funeral parlour, for instance. In this I had purposely wanted to have two cathedral-like windows at the back to give it a sort of sacred look, a feeling of 'shush, don't speak loudly here.' Well, I walk on to the set in the morning and Charlie Clarke has this lit up like a ballroom. I said, 'Charlie, we can't...' He said, 'It's a comedy, isn't it?' 'It's a comedy but I want this lighted like a funeral parlour, which it is. The undertaker speaks in a soft voice, "Is there something I can do for you?"' I want him in absolute silhouette when the girl comes in. Eliminate all this lighting, let those windows predominate and I want a green light over that coffin there.' Charlie was a little upset, but he got the lighting down and we photographed it. He did a beautiful job and when he saw the scene—which made you laugh and gave you the creeps as well—he saw my point.

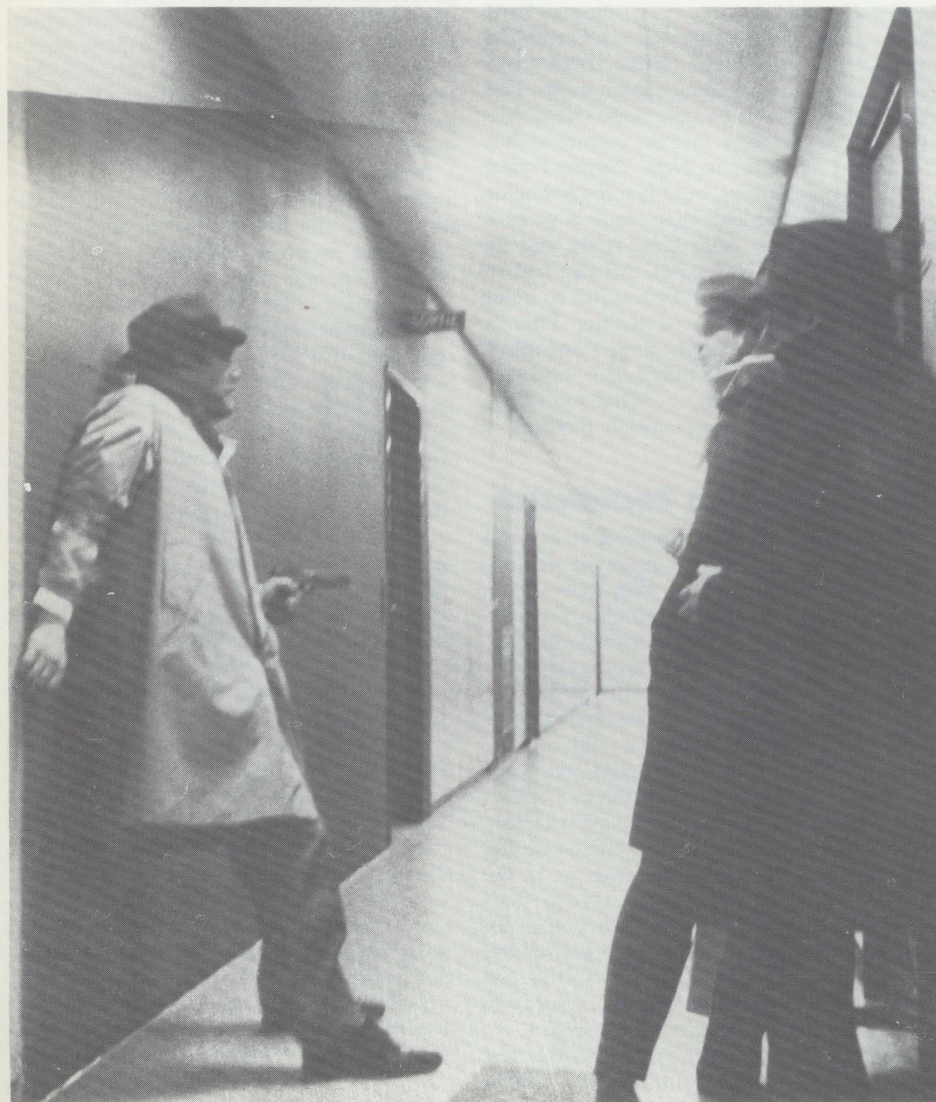
Most of my pictures were on location. I always believed in going to the mountain and not having the mountain coming to me. I convinced people I could do more on location: production managers said the moment I came into a story, 'You might as well forget everything because he will go to the location regardless if it's the other end of the earth.' Sometimes we were lucky; on *Margie* I had found a location north of Sacramento and had taken all the crew up there. While they were taking street measurements and all that kind of thing, I took my regular assistant director, Robert Webb, got in my aeroplane and flew off. Went up to 10,000 feet and got up on top of the overcast. I flew in over Reno and tracked out north and then found a big opening over this Air Force base; I let down through this—this was before instrument flying—and flew the railroad track down. As I turned in by another little town I went by the university and Bob said, 'There's your high school.' I'm only about 400 feet above the houses and I noticed that the main street had got everything on it I needed. I landed in Reno, went back to the university by car and called the property man and told him, 'Get all our group together and come on over here—we have all the locations right here in a box.' I made all the exteriors there, everything just worked on it. The sequence outside the undertaker's parlour called for snow and we were set to do it next day. That morning I woke up and there was eight inches of snow on the ground. We made the first tracks in it.

OPENING THE PRIVATE EYE

Wittgenstein and Godard's Alphaville

Robert MacLean

Lemmy Caution (Eddie Constantine), the private eye at large in the corridors of *Alphaville*



As the camera moves closer to a cup of coffee being stirred in a Paris restaurant, the screen becomes completely black except for swirling shapes which dissolve, re-form and dissolve again, as Jean-Luc Godard whispers: 'Where does it begin? . . . Where does what begin? God created the heavens and the earth. Of course . . . but that's a bit simple, too easy. One should be able to say more . . . Say that the limits of my language are those of my world. That as I speak, I limit the world, I end it . . . and when logical and mysterious death comes to abolish this limit . . . and there will be no more questions, no more answers . . . everything will be amorphous.'

The identification of 'the limits of my language' with 'those of my world' is one of several allusions to Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in this film, *Two or Three Things I Know about Her* (1966), in which the heroine defines language to her son as 'the house in which man lives', speaks of 'the ABC of existence' and repeatedly declares 'I am the world'. The importance of Wittgenstein's thought to what has been called the 'post-modernist sensibility' in literature and film is an extensive subject; what is remarkable here is that his anti-metaphysical restriction, in both his phases, to 'what is the case', has informed various works which set out to report a state of affairs and come up against the impossibility of transcending subjective limitations. 'The world,' according to the *Tractatus*, 'is all that is the case'; and while there is no metaphysical 'subject that thinks or entertains ideas', the world is nevertheless ' "my world" '—'I am my world'—and the subject a 'limit' of the world which cannot be spoken about: in 'a book called *The World as I Found It*', which included 'a report on my body', the subject 'alone could not be mentioned.'*

The salient example of this influence in literature is William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, a report on the solipsistic 'world' of heroin addiction introduced by a citation of Proposition 3.328 in the *Tractatus*, on Occam's razor and the economy of descriptive writing: for Burroughs, language and heroin are equally addictive, in the verifiable sense that withdrawal brings about an intolerable metabolic disturbance. Antonioni has made similar use of John Locke's empiricism to elucidate the problems of reporting in *The Passenger*. What these works have in common is that they are reports which are about reporting and the limitations of word and image, and so become reflexive, if not solipsistic reports in themselves. In the above-quoted film, the *Her* about whom two or three things are known is both a woman in particular socio-economic circumstances and the city of Paris; and the subject of the film, that which we are invited to become aware of, is not those two or three items, but how, through the cinematic medium, they are known. Paris is also the subject of Lemmy Caution's wrist-radio reports in the original treatment of *Alphaville*, which considers almost exclusively the question of how things are known.

Film is a form of analysis, 'the truth,' as Bruno says in *Le Petit Soldat* (1960), 'twenty-four times a second'; and this analysis is literally, not metaphorically, linguistic. Beginning with his attention to signs, billboards and advertising slogans in *Une Femme*

*Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971). Propositions 1, 5.63–5.641. Subsequent references are noted in the text.

Mariée (1964), and continuing through the political analyses in *La Chinoise* (1967) and *One Plus One* (1968), Godard has directed critical attention to the contemporary environment of word and image. In *La Chinoise*, for example, Véronique rejects the idea that a revolutionary should burn all the books, since there would then 'be nothing left to criticise'. Like Burroughs, Godard is concerned to come to terms with the modern American dominated culture machine, more specifically with the languages of film, the Hollywood B-picture vocabulary of plots and attitudes which several of Godard's early films make use of, and which are those forms of thought which limit the world, impose upon the understanding. 'At the cinema,' Godard once said, 'we do not think, we are thought.'

In fact, he regards film, just as Burroughs regards language, as disease, 'the virus, the capitalist microbe in its present form', and, like Burroughs, recommends the setting up of de-intellectualisation schools to combat conditioned mental habits. Language, for Godard, always has the status of an arbitrary habit or skill, and even *Tout Va Bien* (1972), with its heavily didactic political tone, can only conclude with the advice to 'rethink yourself in historical terms', terms which may provide a strenuous and renewing mode of analysis but which have no ultimate or necessary purchase. 'With the probable exception of his view on Vietnam,' Susan Sontag wrote in a 1968 article, 'there is no attitude Godard incorporates in his films that is not simultaneously being bracketed, and therefore criticised, by a dramatisation of the gap between the elegance and seductiveness of ideas and the . . . opaqueness of the human condition.'

The printed definition of 'a word' in *'La Chinoise'* as 'what remains unsaid', suggests Wittgenstein's distinction between the 'content' of sense and that 'form' or arrangement of appearances upon which it is encoded (TLP 2.025, 3.13, 3.31). Just as Wittgenstein illustrates the fact that the subject cannot be found in the world by noting that 'nothing in the visual field allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye' (TLP 5.632, 5.633), Godard has suggested that 'the camera that filmed itself in the mirror would make the ultimate movie,' would record the mechanics of its own recording, supply all information about itself without giving expression to the 'content' of the record, the collation of distinct frames, the understanding of the sense of the film. Moreover, affectless observation and record of what goes on in the mirror is voyeuristic rather than narcissistic, for it presumes no possibility of consummate identity with the image. Godard made *Le Petit Soldat*, he said, about 'a man who finds that the face he sees in the mirror does not correspond to the idea he has of what lies behind it,' someone 'who analyses himself and discovers he is different from the concept he had of himself. Personally, when I look at myself in a mirror I have the same feeling.'

Made in U.S.A. dramatises the problem of identity in terms of language. A dictaphone recording of Paula's voice on the soundtrack says, as she shoots Goodis: 'Where am I? Is it I who is speaking? Can I say that I am these words I speak, through

which my thoughts slide? Can I say that I am these murders I have committed with my own hands, actions which escape from me not only when I have finished, but before I have even started?' Because, as Wittgenstein says, 'Language disguises thought . . . so that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it' (TLP 4.002), it is as impossible to identify Paula with her physiological equipment—'Can I say that I am this life which I feel within me?'—as with the tape-recorder which speaks her words.

Godard's idea of filming the camera as it films is related to his declared wish to 'show—just show, not comment on—the moment when a feeling enters the body and becomes physiologically alive.' Meaning is encoded upon physiology—feelings, laryngeal formations—as upon the mechanical operation of a camera; it is remarked in *Une Femme Mariée*, in fact, that 'Memory is the first thing we teach a machine.' The young intellectuals in *La Chinoise*, who demonstrate their rejection of dualism by striking the word 'DESCARTES' with a suction arrow, recommend the confusion of words and things as a revolutionary activity; similarly, Godard edits his films 'on the basis of what's in the image and on that basis only . . . not in terms of what it signifies, but what signifies it.' By holding to the image and to the shape of the word, he obviates any transcendence of, or, which is the same, identification with the empirically apparent.

Like Paula, we cannot regard speech, or rather the sense which it encodes, as an effect springing from an 'inner' identifiable cause. Godard's remark that *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) 'is not really a film' but 'an attempt at cinema' illustrates this lack of necessary relation between intention and act or realisation: the film is less misleadingly considered as a blueprint, like *Naked Lunch*, the record of an unfulfilled intention. In the same article on *Pierrot*, Godard quotes Claudel's statement that 'This morrow does not follow the day that was yesterday,' and explicates, 'This . . . sentence in movie terms means: two shots in sequence are not successive. Which holds for two that aren't in sequence.' Godard uses montage, not like Eisenstein, to produce something greater than the sum of its parts, but to make two shots strip each other of irrelevant connections, and thus criticises syntactic habits and causal thinking. The myth of continuous time and the causal nexus, which Wittgenstein characterises as 'superstition' (TLP 5.1361), offers the possibility of an account of motive, which in Godard's films, as Susan Sontag points out, is either simplistic or unexplained: 'An art which aims at the present tense cannot aspire to this kind of "depth" or innerness in the portrayal of human beings.' Asked by Georges Franju whether he acknowledged 'the necessity of having a beginning, middle and end in your films,' Godard is said to have replied, 'Certainly. But not necessarily in that order.'*

If for beginning, middle and end can be substituted past, present and future, it is precisely this scrambling that is carried out

*Susan Sontag, 'Godard', *Partisan Review* XXXV, 2 (Spring 1968).

in *Alphaville* (again, one thinks of Burroughs' 'cutup' method of writing, a comparable antidote to paralysis of the understanding). The film begins as the computer Alpha 60 issues the self-interrogative statement, 'Some things in life are too complex for oral transmission. But legend gives them universal form.' Originally entitled *Tarzan versus IBM, Alphaville* proceeds as the mutual criticism of legends or myths, a confrontation between past and future. Lemmy Caution, the hero of a French series of detective novels, is rendered as a compendium of individualist myths, and is played by Eddie Constantine, an expatriate American veteran of French detective films.

Like the 'American trailing across the wounded galaxies' in Burroughs' *Nova Express*, Lemmy has crossed 'intersidereal space' in his Ford Galaxie to reach Alphaville, the totally programmed environment of the future, heralded by the traffic sign, 'ALPHAVILLE. SILENCE. LOGIC. SAFETY. PRUDENCE.' He wears a wrist radio like Dick Tracy's and behaves as a conventional tough guy, insulting and fighting with and finally shooting his hotel's procurer: 'I'm too old to sit around discussing the weather. I shoot. It's the only weapon I have against fate.' Lemmy loves 'women and money' more than anything else and is 'afraid of death . . . but for a humble secret agent fear of death is a cliché . . . like drinking.' Natasha, daughter of Professor Nosferatu, alias von Braun, and thus a product of this future, knows no such fear, has been taught by Alpha 60 that 'death and life exist within the same sphere.'

The computer points out that Lemmy has a 'tendency to dwell in the past,' to 'think far too much of what has happened, instead of what is to become.' And his susceptibility to past formula is dramatised when, surrounded by the police, he is told joke number 842 and seized when he doubles up predictably with laughter. Lemmy's behaviour, that is, is as programmed as that of the citizens of Alphaville: having instructed his Seductress Third Class to hold a centrefold nude over her head, he lounges on the bed reading *The Big Sleep*, a novel about the smashing of a pornography ring, and shoots two holes through the breasts of the pin-up; and when Lemmy comments on Natasha's 'small pointed teeth', he is echoing Philip Marlowe, who repeatedly, in Chandler's book, notices Carmen Sternwood's 'little sharp predatory teeth' and the knife-like teeth of Vivian Regan.

Not only does Lemmy narrate his adventure in the first person, as Marlowe does, but he is associated with the array of tough-guy figures played on the screen by Humphrey Bogart: as he ignites his lighter with a shot from across the room, Anna Karina makes her entrance, like Lauren Bacall in *To Have and Have Not*, with the line, 'Anybody got a match?' Lemmy is Secret Agent Number 003, whose mission is to gather information on Alphaville and to 'liquidate' von Braun and who travels as Ivan Johnson, reporter for *Figaro-Pravda*: 'Haven't you noticed,' he says to von Braun's assistant, 'that Reporter and Revenger start with the same letter?' Like many of Burroughs' characters, he is a spy travelling as a journalist, and as such is both

an importunate investigator, asking 'too many questions' and at one point forcing von Braun into an elevator to interview him, and a rampant voyeur, photographing von Braun's outraged staff, the hidden centre of Alpha 60 and anything else that interests him. As Harry Dickson, an agent who has been broken by Alpha 60's control system, enjoys his last dalliance with a Seductress Third Class, Lemmy watches from behind a wardrobe and photographs the scene; and when the old man dies in orgasm, Lemmy photographs the body.

Godard's original treatment calls for Lemmy's reports on his wrist radio 'to compile a documentary on the town and its inhabitants'; 'true documentary images of present-day life' in Paris, altered by 'a novel, rather strange, mysterious quality.' Three years prior to the making of *Alpha-ville*, Godard told an interviewer: 'According to Truffaut, the cinema consists of the spectacle . . . and research. If I analyse myself today I see that I have always wanted, basically, to make a research film in spectacle form. The documentary side is this: a man is in such and such a situation. The spectacle side comes from making the man a gangster or a secret agent.'

Like Burroughs, Godard puns on the phrase *agent secret*, which suggests an active critical attention which cannot be spoken about or identified with the logical forms and habits of thought. Of course, the philosophical Pragmatists and Behaviourists assume the contrary, and Lemmy's subjectivism is regarded by von Braun as an anachronism: 'Your ideas are strange, Mr. Caution. Several years ago, in the Age of Ideas, they would doubtless have been termed . . . sublime. But look at yourself—men of your kind will soon no longer exist.' The presence of conscious attention, which distinguishes Lemmy from a computer, and to which he refers when he boasts to Alpha 60 of his 'secret', can be defined only negatively or, as Lemmy defines it, with a riddle: 'Something that never changes with the night or the day, as long as the past represents the future, towards which it advances in a straight line, but which finally closes on itself in a circle.' For Alpha 60 to find the answer to the riddle would mean its self-destruction, 'because you would become my equal, my brother'—the throwing away of Wittgenstein's propositional ladder (TLP 6.54). According to Godard, 'To look around one's self, that is to be free.' When Lemmy insists that he is a 'free man', the Chief Engineer comments, 'This reply is meaningless. We know nothing . . . We record . . . we calculate . . . and we draw conclusions . . . Your replies are difficult to code and sometimes impossible.'

Lemmy finds Dickson in a shabby hotel where the clients loiter in the lobby reading detective novels—individuals who have been occluded, like Lee in *Naked Lunch*, from the logical system of Alphaville, and who await execution or suicide. Not only, Dickson reports, are Dick Tracy and Flash Gordon dead, but there are no more novelists, musicians or painters. In bed with his Seductress, Dickson speaks the illegal language of romantic love, and his last words are 'conscience . . . conscience . . . make Alpha 60 destroy itself . . . tenderness . . . save those who weep.' Weeping, too, is



Caution and Chandler

illegal; and the last words of a man who is executed for weeping at his wife's death, and thus 'behaving illogically', are of love, faith and tenderness, things which cannot be codified and of which the citizens of Alphaville are ignorant. Like the artists of the past with whom he is associated, Lemmy speaks for what cannot be spoken about: when he tries to define 'love' ostensibly to Natasha, she understands only the 'sensuality' which is its form. When someone says 'something metaphysical', according to Wittgenstein, it is demonstrable that he has 'failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions' (TLP 6.53; the pun is unavoidable):

Propositions can express nothing that is higher.

It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words.

Ethics is transcendental.

(Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.) (TLP 6.42, 6.421)

But if the metaphysical cannot be described, or embodied in the clichéd deportment of the individualist hero, neither can it be negated or reduced to the unambiguously logical. When Natasha defends Alphaville's total commitment to rational structure by remarking, 'we minimise the unknown', Lemmy renames the city 'Zeroville'; and he sneers at von Braun's opposition of 'my moral and even metaphysical sense of destiny with nothing more than a physical and mental existence created and dictated by technocracy.' The mythic totalitarian behaviouristic future utterly crushes the independence which Lemmy so grandly over-dramatises: Alpha 60 dwarfs the individual intelligence by formulating problems for itself—train and plane time-tables, electric power supply, war—which 'no one can understand because the methods and data used by Alpha 60 are too complex.' Like Burroughs' control machine, it 'predicts the data which Alphaville obeys', and eloquently defends those more familiar forms of control which it represents: 'Nor is there in the so-called capitalist world, or Communist world, any malicious intent to suppress men through the power of ideology or materialism, but only the natural aim of all organisations to increase their rational structure.'

Alphaville is the result of continuous growth in time, that evolutionary development to which Wittgenstein assigns the dubious validity of 'any other hypothesis in natural science' (TLP 4.1122), the logical movement from past through present to future, which is the basis of the anti-subjectivist myths of progress. All Alpha

60's decisions are directed, it assures Lemmy, toward an 'ultimate' and 'universal good'; the inhabitants, whom Lemmy regards as 'slaves to probability', are 'the end-products of a series of mutations', and those are excluded who 'don't manage to adapt'. According to the Chief Engineer, one must never say 'why', as Lemmy does, but 'because'. 'In the life of all individuals, as well as in the lives of nations, everything is determined by cause and effect.' Like Peirce, the Pragmatists and the Behaviourists, who base their thinking on Darwin's theory of evolution, von Braun's technicians regard final causation as alone primary, the motive impetus from indeterminacy to the complete reign of law.

Those who are convicted of illogical behaviour are executed, of course, at the Institute of General Semantics; thought is linguistically controlled. The hotel bible turns out to be the latest issue of the Alphaville dictionary ('But isn't it the same in the Outer Lands, Mr. Johnson?'), continually updated by the deletion and replacement of words. Natasha does not understand 'love' or 'conscience', and becomes frightened when she knows a word without memory of having heard or read it, for the limits of her language are those of her world. Symbols are completely arbitrary—in Alphaville a shake of the head means 'yes', a nod, 'no'—and in this case Alpha 60 arbitrates them; its voice renders each word as a series of distinct metallic sounds without inflection, reducing language, as it is put in *La Chinoise*, 'to sounds and matter'. But Lemmy insists that words have meaning, refuses, for example, to 'betray the Outer Lands'; he commandeers a car as he escapes the police, orders the driver, played by Godard, 'Wait here and don't move,' and on second thought shoots him dead: 'That's to be sure you'll keep your word, pal.'

However, in the course of his confrontation with the future, Lemmy is torn away from his attachment to the archetypal postures of the past, and is left in an uncomfortably ambiguous middle ground, struggling to derive meaning from arbitrary signs. Having killed von Braun and fired into the computer, Lemmy finds himself moving through darkened corridors, 'running along a straight line, which reminded me of the Greek labyrinth that Dickson told me about, in which so many philosophers had lost their way, where even a secret agent could stray from his course.' Inhabitants of Alphaville, cut off from the source of electrical energy upon which they depend, grope along the walls of these darkened corridors. In an essay for *L'Avant Scène* written about and contemporaneously with the making of *La Chinoise*, Alain Jeffroy writes: 'Wittgenstein écrit quelque part qu'un homme qui vit dans la confusion philosophique ne sait pas même trouver la porte ouverte pour en sortir. A ce pauvre homme, il conseille de longer les murs, plutôt que se fracasser la tête contre eux: au bout, il trouvera fatalement la porte.' Like Lee the Agent, Lemmy moves toward the door at the end of the long hall. His critical predicament, that is, suggests the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, for whom 'Language is a labyrinth of paths,' and who regards 'meaning something' as going 'up to the thing we mean . . . so one is oneself in motion. One is

rushing ahead and so cannot see oneself rushing ahead*—hence the straight-line, self-contained movement which Lemmy describes to Alpha 60 as his 'secret'.

ALPHA 60: 'Is there a difference between the mystery of the laws of knowledge and those of love?'

LEMMY: 'In my opinion there is no mystery in love.'

But both meaning and love are inexpressible, since that which advances cannot be codified or spoken about, must be passed over in silence. The man condemned for weeping urges the necessity of simply advancing 'in a straight line towards all that we love.' When Natasha responds to Lemmy with poetry, she says, 'One need only advance to live, to go / Straightforward towards all you love.' And Lemmy taunts Alpha 60 with another paradoxical definition of the human situation: 'Take a look at her and me! There's your reply. We are happiness . . . and we are making our way towards it.' This 'reply', of course, does not compute: Alpha 60 had specifically demanded a 'yes or no' answer.

If Lemmy is a 'Security threat' to the computer's digital logic, he is also threatened, the code of the past endangered by the future, and it is in this context that his fear of death is interesting: 'I had the impression,' he says, 'that my life here was becoming a shadow, a twilight memory . . . of a doubtless awesome destiny.' Alpha 60 is not only a futuristic version of the 'IBM . . . Olivetti . . . General Electric' computers of the 1960s, it is that ultimate memory machine which does turn Lemmy into a shadow, which as Godard has suggested 'films death at work': the moving camera. If Lemmy is an individual voyeur, Alpha's 60's camera eyes observe every act of every citizen in Alphaville, so that it can deduce from his actions that Lemmy is not who he says he is. When Lemmy comments that 'news travels fast around here,' von Braun replies, 'at about 186,000 miles per second,' a speed appropriate to the 'Civillisation of Light' brought about by the film image.

In its lecture on itself, Alpha 60 makes the point that the 'future', as we know it, exists in the present: 'The Central Memory is given its name because of the fundamental role it plays in the logical organisation of Alpha 60. But no one has lived in the past and no one will live in the future. The present is the form of all life, and there are no means by which this can be avoided. Time is a circle which is endlessly revolving. The descending arc is the past and the rising arc is the future. Everything has been said. At least as long as words don't change their meanings and meanings their words . . . Nothing existed here before us. No one. We are absolutely alone here. We are unique, dreadfully unique. The meaning of words and of expressions is no longer grasped. One isolated word or an isolated detail in a drawing can be understood. But the comprehension of the whole escapes us. Once we know the number 1, we believe we know the number 2, because 1 plus 1 makes 2. But we do not even know what "plus" means.'

That this is a problem of film syntax, of how 'sense' is made of sequence plus sequence, shot plus shot, frame plus frame, is made clear in Godard's later *One Plus One*: as for Wittgenstein, understanding is linguistic, an ability to add things together into verbal contexts which cannot itself be understood. If the computer must be made to destroy itself, so must the film undercut the narrative context which holds it together, the temporal progression from beginning through middle to end, or, in terms of its 'content', from past through present to future; so that Alpha 60's last words before its destruction are a quotation of Borges' *A New Refutation of Time*, an essay on Locke, Berkeley and Hume which rejects the notion of temporal continuity: 'The present is terrifying because it is irreversible . . . because it is shackled, fixed like steel . . . Time is the material of which I am made . . . Time is a stream which carries me along . . . but I am Time . . . it is a tiger which tears me apart, but I am the tiger.'

Lemmy leaves Alpha 60's lecture on understanding 'because I couldn't understand a single word'; but later, when Natasha complains that since his arrival she can no longer understand what is happening, he says, 'Me!—I'm just beginning to understand, I think.' Like the works of Burroughs and Antonioni, *Alphaville* is about the irreducibly simple fact of being awake, and represents sleep as the boundary bracketing an ineluctably subjective and ambiguous experience; so that when Natasha finally awakens to ask if she has slept for long, Lemmy replies, 'No . . . a mere fraction of time.' Of central structural importance, then, is Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, the title of which is Marlowe's euphemism for death, and is related to Godard's statements in interviews about film. For one falls into dream at the cinema, 'but people prefer to dream in the first degree rather than the second which is the true reality.' Those who cannot see what is in front of them 'because they are always attached to what went before,' are 'not dreamers, they are asleep and lazy. To dream is to contemplate and to let oneself go.'

'Take a look at her and me . . .': Eddie Constantine, Anna Karina



Many of those who cannot adapt in Alphaville are electrocuted in their seats while watching a film, anaesthetised and passive in the midst of first-degree dream, the seats tipping up and depositing them into huge garbage cans. Returning from this spectacle to his hotel, Lemmy declares his wish 'to sleep, perchance to dream', suggesting thereby his nascent willingness, despite his fear of death, to liberate his attention by putting aside his stereotypical code, his attachment to what went before; accordingly, he rejects von Braun's offer of all the money and women he wants and escapes into intersidereal space. But there is thereby no transcendence of logic, only an awakening of conscious attention to its limits, a dismantling and rearrangement of its component parts, as in the explosion of Alpha 60. The final scene of *Alphaville*, in which Lemmy and Natasha drive away from the burning city, is modelled on a scene in Howard Hawks' film of *The Big Sleep*, with Bogart and Bacall exchanging declarations of love as they drive away from a preliminary showdown at Eddie Mars' farmhouse:

NATASHA: 'I don't know what to say. At least I don't know the words. Please help me . . .'

LEMMY: 'Impossible, Princess. You've got to manage by yourself, and only then will you be saved.'

NATASHA: 'I . . . love . . . you . . . I love you.'

Lemmy insists upon that synthetic effort which cannot itself be spoken about or understood: the addition of 'I' plus 'love' plus 'you' expresses a sense and, indirectly, the role of the conscious individual in speaking an arbitrary and habitual communal language, as in giving a film cliché 'meaning'. In terms of the temporal triptych, the fact that the prototype is not the last scene of the Hawks film suggests that *Alphaville* moves from beginning, through end, to middle. Just as the past advances toward the future in a straight line, Lemmy, who represents the individualist past, advances toward Natasha, who inhabits the behaviourist future, so that the two meet on the middle ground of the self-conscious present, the tense of the film image. ■

*Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), 203, 455-57.



Sullivan (Joel McCrea) sets out to discover America

HOLLYWOOD TRAVELS

STURGES and SULLIVAN

E. Rubinstein

From the *Show People* of Marion Davies to *The Big Knife* of Clifford Odets, from the pleasant elegance of *The Bad and the Beautiful* to the cruel eloquence of *Sunset Boulevard*, from *What Price Hollywood?* to *A Star is Born* to *A Star is Born*, Hollywood has always been pleased to perform its self-abuse in public. But in a class all its own is Preston Sturges' *Sullivan's Travels*, in part because, unlike so many of the other movies about the making of movies, Sturges' film doesn't ignore but instead rejoices in the potential absurdity of any studio product that gazes down on the ways of Hollywood from imagined peaks of moral and artistic superiority. Indeed, it's precisely this absurdity that Sturges seizes on both for occasion and for theme.

The opening sequence makes Sturges' two main points as Sturges only seldom chose to make his points: without dialogue. (*Sullivan's Travels* is in fact an unusually silent movie: think of the chase during the first journey, the entire third journey, the first part of the fourth, and several shorter sequences. I suppose that in theory it isn't surprising that this movie about movies should rely so heavily on purely visual effect; it is a bit surprising from Sturges.)

Immediately following the credit titles we see two men fighting atop a speeding railway carriage. It is night. The battle is fierce. The Presto of the 'Moonlight' Sonata rushes on in the orchestra. One of the men fires at the other. Clutching each other, the two plunge into a river. A title appears on the screen: THE END.

After this opening, we learn that the actual scene is a studio projection room. John L. Sullivan, an immensely successful director of comedies (*Ants in Your Plants* of 1939 is one), has had the film shown to persuade two studio executives to let him make movies of 'social significance'; for the two men fighting in the movie, as he

carefully explains, are 'Capital' and 'Labour', the scene has 'symbolism' and 'teaches... a moral lesson.' In the course of a grotesque dialogue on the relative value of 'message' and 'entertainment' pictures, the executives make the mistake of persuading Sullivan that he hasn't 'suffered' enough to direct the film version of a novel by one Sinclair Beckstein called *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Sullivan accepts their judgment and sets forth on the first of four voyages in search of real suffering, voyages that bring him ever closer to worlds of irremediable poverty and irremediable despair. The basic premise of the plot is established.

But much more has been established by the film clip alone: it does indeed teach lessons, if not exactly the moral lessons Sullivan had in mind. First of all, representing as it does Sullivan's notion of what a 'message' movie should be, it teaches us that Sullivan's aspirations are absurd even before his own arguments trap him in a demonstration of his fatuity. For when you make a scene of men fighting to the death on top of a train, only very specific signals such as the designations 'Labour' and

'Capital' can alert your audience to the fact that it isn't looking at one of the stalest images of action movies, and in the circumstances your designation can only look foolish and arbitrary. Images denote genres, and the power of genre in our experience of movies is nowhere more clearly revealed than in *Sullivan's Travels*. If the likes of Sullivan did make *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, we'd have only an undistinguished representative of precisely the wrong genre, with 'social significance' thrown in even more gratuitously than that 'little bit of sex' one of the executives keeps trying to work into any scenario.

All this suggests an issue so basic that I'd better try to clarify it at once: both Sullivan and Sturges are directors of comedies, and there the resemblance ends. In *Unfaithfully Yours*, Sturges would face the challenge of viewing with irony a central character deeply identifiable with himself. In *Sullivan's Travels* no such challenge exists. Sullivan proclaims himself a clod with his opening gesture, his illustration of what a film of 'social significance' should resemble; he goes on to certify his cloddishness by his very dependence on terms like 'social significance'. Even at the end, after voyaging in earnest into the darkest areas of American experience, he has learned only that 'There's a lot to be said for making people laugh. Did you know that's all some people have? It isn't much, but it's better than nothing in this cockeyed caravan.' True, this makes more sense than Sullivan's opening remarks, but even if one accepts the endorsement of comedy as charity in a world gone to hell one can't take it seriously as the justification of the existence of a Sturges and of a film like *Sullivan's Travels*. Between this speech and the written dedication at the beginning of the movie—"To the memory of those who made us laugh: the motley mountebanks, the clowns, the buffoons in all times and in all nations, whose efforts have lightened our burden a little..."—comes a show of film-making quite beyond Sturges' red herring messages and quite beyond Sullivan's understanding or praise.

Even as an endorsement of comedy, the closing speech is drained of much of its effect by virtue of being pronounced by Sullivan: we're told that he has been a successful director of comedies, but Joel McCrea's performance makes the claim a little hard to credit. McCrea's Sullivan barely smiles in the course of the movie, and laughs—desperately and convulsively at first, clearly at war with all the pressures of his own nature—on one single occasion, during the prison sequence near the end when he is seated among fellow convicts and destitute Southern blacks at a Disney cartoon. How could this living monument to humourlessness make comedies, let alone Sturges movies?

The difference between Sullivan the director and Sturges the director must be allowed to speak for itself, so Sturges appropriates both the violence and the railroad imagery of the opening sequence throughout the film, and more particularly for the single most intricate scene in any Sturges movie. The premise of the scene is simple enough: an old hobo who steals Sullivan's money is in effect destroyed by his own greed. But

the treatment is such that a shot-by-shot analysis may serve best:

(1) After we see the tramp dragging the unconscious Sullivan into hiding, we have the first shot of a train. It is led into view, like a gigantic beast, by an attendant carrying a lantern. It grows ever larger in the frame, its lamp like a great eye filling the screen with light.

(2) A medium shot of the tramp alongside the train as it passes. He runs first in one direction, then the other, finally passing out of the frame to the left; but the shot is held, giving us a sense of the length of the train.

(3) A long crane shot of the tramp running up a flight of steps; the camera turns to show him now running across what looks like acres of criss-crossing tracks. Finally he attains the farthest reaches of the cinematic field; he falls; the dollar bills fly into the air.

(4) A medium shot of the tramp caught in an inverted V of two crossing tracks, stuffing bills into his pockets.

(5) A shot apparently from the cabin of a train—a train now moving fast, its lamp illuminating the tracks before us.

(6) A medium shot, slightly closer than (4) and from a slightly different angle, of the tramp picking up bills.

(7) Again a shot from the point of view of the train. We see a field of signal lights and, again, an incomprehensible criss-cross design of tracks.

(8) The same set-up as (4). The tramp is still gathering up the bills. But now the light from the train's headlamp begins to illuminate the space. The tramp looks up.

(9) A shot from the point of view of the tramp: the train is heading directly towards him.

(10) Again the set-up of (4), but now in a light more terrifying than the earlier darkness. The tramp stares at the oncoming train. He runs back and forth over the maze of tracks, the camera following him.

(11) A shot of the tramp running in the direction of the camera, the light from the train now behind him and shining directly into the lens.

(12) A long shot from the cabin, the tramp running and looking back over his shoulder at the camera.

(13) The same set-up as (11), but the tramp in his flight has come much closer to the camera.

(14) The same set-up as (12), but the train is now almost on top of the tramp. It comes closer and closer. Waving his arms, the tramp sends a new shower of bills into the air.

(15) A medium shot of one section of a track. The train illuminates the scene, but fitfully, as it passes. The bills rain down—followed by a boot.

The rhythmical complexity of the sequence is manifest. And it's matched by a kind of directorial dexterity Sturges had never shown before and would never need to show again. In the sense it gives of a human agent controlled by an indecipherable higher logic, embodied in a labyrinth of tracks, and by an indecipherable god, embodied in an unseen and oblivious switchman, the scene may remind you of Fritz Lang. In the inevitability of its montage—images of the ineluctable power of a destructive industrialism versus images of a man already destroyed morally by a system that will now reduce even his body to unidentifiable fragments—it may remind you of Eisenstein. It will not remind you of John L. Sullivan.

Bearing the weight of scenes like this,

Sullivan's Travels can't be read as a simple-minded blanket vindication of Preston Sturges, *Ants in Your Plants* of 1939, Mickey Mouse, and anything else that might make people laugh. But the explicit message is there, and is important. It's there for its apparent impudence: that's Sturges. It's there too as the inevitable conclusion attained by a director of comedies whom we see living through hells he has never imagined, but whom we also see in a movie whose controlling style, whatever the effect of any given scene, announces happy endings. In short, it's there because the plot exacts its presence as specifically as the plot exacts the marriage of Joel McCrea and Veronica Lake. The message is there to suit the plot, and not the other way around; it's the plot, not the message, that counts. For the story of a movie director who must make many journeys allows Sturges to place Sullivan in a variety of physical settings (Hollywood offices and railroad yards, among others) otherwise improbable in a single film, settings which then inevitably open up a variety of cinematic implications otherwise improbable in a single film. And this brings me to the second point made in the opening sequence by the film-within-a-film.

It teaches that anything we see on the screen is a movie, and that only very specific signals such as unexpected end titles can alert us to the differences between what might be called primary and secondary reality in any film. In other words, the fight on the train is our movie until we're told it was only an intrusion into our movie. (Later on, *Sullivan's Travels* is twice interrupted by the overt intrusion of other movies. There's the Disney cartoon we watch along with Sullivan near the end. There's also the picture show Sullivan attends in the company of a lecherous widow, and while here we don't actually witness what Sullivan and the widow witness, the background music [Chopin's E-minor Prelude orchestrated into mush] and the titles posted outside the theatre [it's a triple bill: *Beyond These Tears*, *The Valley of the Shadow*, *The Buzzard of Berlin*] tell us what we need to know of the quality of suffering being enacted on the screen. These scenes contribute significantly to the film, but situated as they are in already established contexts of the plot, they lack the force of the opening sequence.)

The importance of the lesson lies in the fact that the opening melodramatic snippet readies us for many other scenes which, if screened out of context, would also per-

Sullivan at the picture show for the chain gang prisoners—a Disney cartoon



suasively resemble kinds of movies *Sullivan's Travels* isn't supposed to be. A partial list is in order. (1) I've already noted the affinities of one episode with Eisenstein and Lang; and while exact pastiche of neither, it certainly evokes what used to be called the 'art film' more startlingly than anything else in Paramount comedies. (2) At one point Sullivan hops aboard the soap-box car of a 13-year-old boy and goes through a couple of minutes of sheer terror as they're pursued by a gang of studio personnel in a land yacht. Though magnified into Sturgesan proportions, the chase (wordless, of course) is obviously an *hommage* to Mack Sennett and his successors. (3) When McCrea and Lake ride the freight trains, the imagery recalls several 1930s movies about men and boys forced into vagrancy, most specifically William Wellman's *Wild Boys of the Road*, in which a girl conceals her long hair and her gender by means of a cap exactly like the one Lake wears for the same purpose. (The very angles of several shots of vagrants getting on and off moving freight cars are virtually identical in the two movies: whether or not this was inevitable given the identity of subject is for my purposes irrelevant.) (4) The scenes of the black congregation, led by a preacher who could

Veronica Lake and Joel McCrea; echoes of 'Wild Boys of the Road'; Sullivan's affronted entourage (Eric Blore, Robert Greig)



pass for De Lawd himself, suggest one familiar cinematic treatment of Southern black experience: think not only of *Green Pastures* but of King Vidor's *Hallelujah*. (I have to add that everywhere else, including the first section of *Sullivan's Travels*, Sturges drew on a different tradition of cinematic negritude, the nature of which is revealed by the fact that one of the Pullman attendants in *The Palm Beach Story* is played by an actor named—would I were making it up—Snowflake.) (5) The entire last episode also recalls 30s films, here the cycle of which Mervyn LeRoy's *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* is the best remembered. The extreme low angle shot of the chained men entering the church, a shot that melodramatically asserts both the terrors and the nobility of slavery, is again like nothing else in Paramount comedies—or indeed in *Sullivan's Travels*.

I could extend the list, and someone who knows 30s movies better than I could extend it further.* *Sullivan's Travels* isn't merely a catalogue of cinematic reference; it is, in significant part, a very anthology of genres and styles; but it deals in counterfeit excerpts. John L. Sullivan experiences various griefs and terrors in order to find out that he wants to make comedies; Preston Sturges meanwhile demonstrates that all such griefs and terrors have by now been transmuted into various kinds of movies we've all seen. By this I don't mean to imply that Sturges' handling of the grimmer episodes is motivated by cynicism. The chain gang sequence and the others, like the slapstick chase, are not parodies but renderings, or at least renditions, of their models; Sturges documents as well as LeRoy the unspeakable life in Southern prisons. And so Sturges also demonstrates that he can execute as well as anyone the kinds of movies he anthologises. Finally he demonstrates that, by inventing an extraordinary new context for familiar imagery, he can momentarily revitalise not only that imagery but American comedy itself. No film in Hollywood history except *Citizen Kane* manifests so boldly its maker's belief in his own powers. And Sturges brings it off. And the public bought it.

The public that bought it was the public which in the same year showed considerably more caution in spending its dollars on *Kane*. The most obvious reasons are probably valid, yet in truth the two films have much in common. Both are animated (unless 'frenzied' is the word) by a delight in games that can be played in movies, even if the games they opt for aren't always the same ones. Most of all, the two films are comparable in a way suggested by a recent circular for a New York revival house which in a moment of blind inspiration described *Citizen Kane* as 'a landmark in film criticism'. That I think the phrase could as well be applied to *Sullivan* as to *Kane* is clear from what I've already written about Sturges' movie; but Sturges alone knew how to get around the compelling

fact that, in 1941, film criticism didn't sell like movies.

While Welles' strategy is to shock us into attention, Sturges' is to coax us into believing that what we're watching couldn't really be all that foreign to our expectations. And his principal tactic is that of never letting us forget that what we're watching is first and last a Paramount comedy, a species of film Sturges both promoted and nurtured but neither invented nor finished off. The very allusions and pastiches of this 'landmark in film criticism' are in no way incompatible with the species: Paramount comedies of Sturges' day were always pointing to themselves, to one another, and to the studio out of which they grew.

At, or at least near, the bottom of the Paramount ladder are the Bob Hope movies, especially the *Road* comedies with Bing Crosby, full of endless dull allusions to that which is made to seem no funnier in memory than the first time around, full too of enough ruptures of the fictive surface—to remind us it's all only a movie—to have caused Pirandello and Groucho to wish themselves unborn. Even at this primitive level Sturges shows himself a loyal Paramount man. He has Sullivan answer a policeman's question about Lake, 'How does a girl fit in the picture?' with 'There's always a girl in the picture. Haven't you ever been to the movies?' (And 'The Girl' is in fact the only name Lake has, even in the cast credits.)

Sturges resorts to the standard in-jokes, long the traffic of Hollywood radio comedians, about dullard executives and dishonest agents and alimony-crazed ex-wives. He invokes names like Lubitsch and Capra. He shows us sound stages during production—if you look past Lake in her Bo Peep costume near the end as she receives the news that Sullivan is still alive you will glimpse Preston Sturges—and in many other such seemingly unsophisticated ways makes us recall how much we know about dear mad Hollywood and with what ease we can visit there. But as an added benefit he makes us understand that this is the real and only world of movie-making and so of movie directors, the essentially comic world that Sullivan may quit for a while but to which he must sooner or later return, like the heroes of Elizabethan pastoral who in the end bring their country wisdoms back with them to the courts in which and to which they belong.

Perhaps a rung higher than the *Road* comedies are ersatz documentaries of Paramount life like *Star-Spangled Rhythm*, higher if only because they give us a great many performers instead of an omnipresent Hope. Higher still are comedies like *Hold Back the Dawn* (also 1941): in the opening sequence the actual director, Mitchell Leisen, plays a Paramount director getting Veronica Lake through a take (this is the last we see of her) while observed by Charles Boyer, a visitor to the set who wants the director to listen to a scenario which, even as he begins to recite it, turns into a Paramount movie called *Hold Back the Dawn*. And at the top of the ladder is *Sullivan's Travels*, but it's a ladder that starts in the rag-and-bone shop of Bob Hope's mind.

Instructive too are the ways Welles and Sturges use their actors. While both feel the need for a distinctive company of

secondary players, Welles imports most of his from New York, filling the screen with presences never known before, none yet a movie type, some even ageing fifty years before our eyes in the course of the movie. Sturges draws on the natural resources of Hollywood to come up with an assortment of actors as familiar to us as the furniture in our homes but considerably less subject to variation. We may find ourselves initially surprised at the vision of that Utopian manservant Eric Blore outfitting McCrea in the habit of a tramp, or at the sound of Robert Greig (the butler, of course) delivering a Shavian tirade on the evils of poverty, or at Frank Moran of the gravel voice and ex-pug face offering 'It's what they call a paraphrase' in explication of the phrase 'the valley of the shadow of adversity,' but their presences and their presentness reassure us that whatever madness Sturges had in mind, these men, along with William Demarest and Franklin Pangborn and the others, will always be there in the perfect logic of their eccentricities, never meaningfully younger or older, perpetual epiphanies.

Welles seizes on a defenceless actress named Dorothy Comingore, thrusts her into the nightmare role of Susan Alexander, makes clear to us that he is exhausting her physical and emotional possibilities as a performer and then leaves her—and it doesn't take the hindsight of thirty-five years to perceive this—with nowhere to go as an actress save back to obscurity. Sturges takes an equally defenceless actress named Veronica Lake, known only as something of a sexual sensation in one previous movie, unexpectedly emphasises her slender boyishness in *travesti* costumes while allowing her to function as the sexually alert and aggressive figure in the plot, keeps her talking largely in fascinating mutterings and whispers, and thereby lets us know that we're watching the birth of a unique film persona and this year's biggest new movie star. (Sturges presented his studio with a potential Carole Lombard and his studio then did what it could to transform her into another Dorothy Lamour; but that's hardly Sturges' fault.) If all this is called catering to the public it's nothing to be ashamed of.

Welles makes a movie that fairly blinds us by its refusal to look like any other movie. Sturges makes a movie that, when it isn't looking the way it's supposed to look, at least looks like other movies and so never quite looks foreign. Welles makes a movie that uses every technical resource of a Hollywood studio to produce the effect that it could never have been made in a Hollywood studio. Sturges makes us feel that for all his movie's novelty it could never have been made anywhere but in a Hollywood studio, whose end has always been our comfort and amusement. It goes without saying, though given my argument I'd better say it, that *Kane* is incomparably the greater film. But then *Kane* is so incomparably greater than almost any film from Hollywood or anywhere else that it serves to place Sturges' achievement in perspective without trivialising it. It's our loss that Orson Welles the director could never do more than make brilliant movies, couldn't ever learn how to make it in pictures. It's our gain that at least for a while Preston Sturges knew exactly how. ■

*I haven't even brought up lines merely alluding to other films. When, for example, Lake says to McCrea, 'You sort of belong to me. When you were a hobo, I found you,' I assume she's referring to the scavenger hunt for 'forgotten men' in Gregory La Cava's *My Man Godfrey* (1936).

Film Reviews



'Sérail': Leslie Caron, Marie-France Pisier, Bulle Ogier

Sérail

A preamble: the autobiographical first film is by now a fairly common occurrence everywhere, and a regular one in France. It is as if, for the young director, there are certain things that simply must be *got down* on film, certain themes—mostly of adolescence and sexual awakening—that must be treated first. Having worked them out of his system, he can proceed in his second film to explore the more purely formal or genre possibilities of the medium. Thereafter, with luck, he will have become himself and be referred to by his surname alone. *Sérail* (Contemporary) is the first film directed by Eduardo De Gregorio, who was screenwriter for Bertolucci, Rivette (from *Céline et Julie* onward) and Jean-Louis Comolli. Were one to see *Sérail* without prior knowledge of its maker, however, one would be very unlikely to guess at its status. It is anything but autobiographical. Not only does it subvert both the Gothic thriller and the comedy of manners to its own narrative ends, but it slaloms around the obstacles of such 'deconstruction' in an extremely nimble manner. In fact, like some extra-bright college student, De Gregorio would seem to have skipped a whole year and begun with what is truly a second (or even third) film.

The scene of this essay in the 'light fantastic' is a country house for sale somewhere in the French provinces. To it comes Eric Sange (Corin Redgrave), the author of what one supposes to be superior detective novels. Its door is opened by Ariane (Bulle Ogier), a wanton, somewhat frail blonde who guides him very perfunctorily about its rooms, taking special care to point out the drawbacks. Intrigued by her behaviour—which is climaxed by a total disap-

pearing act—he comes back next morning to be greeted this time by a dour housekeeper, too grand to be a maid yet with a classic French maid's name: Céleste (Leslie Caron). She in turn leads Eric into a salon, amid whose Coromandel screens and Persian rugs Agathe (Marie-France Pisier), a cheerfully languid brunette, is combing out her wet hair. Claiming never to have set eyes on any Ariane, she suggests none the less that Céleste and she absent themselves to allow him to entrap his phantom blonde. That evening... But *Sérail's* mode of narration is one punctuated by question-marks rather than periods and one is tempted, in summarising its plot, to remain faithful to its spirit.

Why, then, do Agathe and Céleste pretend to be alone in the house? Is it all a charade to inveigle him into buying it? Is Céleste really proposing the sale of a seraglio? Why does she bury in the kitchen-garden the money paid over for the property? What causes Eric's novel (about a writer who visits a house in which...) to fade from the page as soon as it is typed? Marianne Moore once memorably defined poetry as an imaginary garden with real toads in it; of the half-dozen hypothetical toads in the imaginary garden of De Gregorio's fiction, which will turn out to be the real one? And what more natural for the scenarist of *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* and *The Spider's Stratagem* than that the 'real' toad belongs squarely in the realm of the *fantastique*, fiction's own fiction?

The spectator shares with Eric both a point of view and the desire that it fosters to lance the mystery, a process of identification which De Gregorio playfully modulates by giving now Eric, now the spectator, first refusal of each false hypothesis as it comes along. With its three volatile actresses and no less volatile décor—the

house is in a perpetual state of transformation—*Sérail* generates a mood of erotic claustrophobia, to which the prosaic eroticism of incidental plot details serves mostly as support. (I except the mutual excitation of Eric and Agathe, which elicits an authentic *frisson*, but note that it is entirely verbal, and a half-lie to boot.) Poor Eric, lulled by the double superiority of his maleness and his novelist's omniscience, comes on to his harum-scarum harem rather like a cruder version of the Brial character in *Le Genou de Claire*—to which might be traced the root of his peculiarly un-English name: Eric (Rohmer: Films du Lo) Sange. But the film flees from him deeper and deeper into the recesses of pure fiction, from the *moral* to the *fantastique*; it is his vain pursuit of that fiction which makes for a kind of narrative striptease, the removal of whose seventh veil reveals nothing at all, or nothing of flesh and blood, but whose prize is still a head on a plate: Eric's own.

If this makes it sound like a po-faced 'structuralist' exercise (the quotation marks are not mine, but come built-in to the word in its generally derisive Anglo-Saxon usage) nothing could be further from the truth. Where *Céline et Julie* was a genuinely avant-garde movie that children could enjoy, *Sérail* might almost be considered a fairy-tale for grown-ups. Its most immediate qualities are the critically disreputable ones of charm and wit and polish, and its flaws—there is a slight smudging of the fantasy scenes and the character of Eric remains ambiguous and out of focus one degree beyond what the director perhaps intended—are not crucial. A suave camera style and direction of actors owing more to Cukor and Mankiewicz than to the *cinéaste* he has most often worked with, permit De Gregorio to maintain a delicious funny-frightening tone throughout, from the first encounter with Ariane via a dinner-party whose small-talk manages to encompass public executions and Wilkie Collins to Eric's final 'castration' (a word used here in its literal, i.e. psychic sense, the surgical act being the symbol rather than vice versa). And Leslie Caron dispatches a lobster into the next world with enviable ease. All in all, a very striking début.

GILBERT ADAIR

Julia

Julia (Fox) sets the capstone on the process by which Lillian Hellman has been transformed from a minor radical author into a major cultural monument. Clearly she fills some emotional need among American middle-class intellectuals, who have seized upon her three volumes of discursive, evasive, elliptical autobiography (*An Unfinished Woman*, *Pentimento*, *Scoundrel Time*) and made them best-sellers, giving Miss Hellman an historical centrality and public *réclame* she never had as a playwright or screenwriter. A largely unrepentant fellow-traveller, who (unlike her lover of twenty-odd years, Dashiell Hammett) never actually joined the Communist Party, she appears to embody an easy, unbroken line of liberal opposition, from the 'premature anti-fascism' of the 1930s through the McCarthy era up to the anti-Vietnam campaign and Watergate. Precisely because she eschewed ideas and ideology, her career presents her admirers with something pure and redemptive. Her fuel is anger and contempt, and through her memoirs they are transmuted into art. In reading her books the critical observer finds it difficult to engage with her. Mundane concerns like logic, analysis or matters of fact are brushed aside: aesthetics become politics, politics become morality, and morality is subsumed into some elite ethical code to which only Miss Hellman and her mentor Hammett are privy. So too is it in even more seductive form with this movie.

The best of *Pentimento's* seven 'portraits', 'Julia' is an account of the author's friendship with a rich schoolfriend, who cut herself off

from her unfeeling family (though not its money) to study medicine, first at Oxford and then under Freud in Vienna, before throwing in her lot with the anti-Nazi underground, losing first a leg fighting for the Austrian communist workers in 1934, and then her life at the hands of the Brownshirts in 1939. In 1937 Miss Hellman, who was on her way from Paris to Moscow, was asked by Julia to smuggle a large sum of money into Germany to help facilitate the escape of refugees, and the memoir is developed in flashbacks from this journey.

Railways were of course a regular setting of political melodrama in the 30s, and on the page 'Julia' had a lively Hitchcockian flavour. One enjoyed the ten minutes taken in reading it, and passed on, looking back gratefully 150 heavy pages later to the excitements it had provided. Alvin Sargent's slick, faithful screenplay merely indulges in a little inflation and conflation, expanding scenes in the original and culling a few things from other parts of the memoirs, most especially to make Dashiell Hammett (impersonated with conviction by a slightly overweight Jason Robards) bulk larger. But watching the picture for two somewhat leisurely hours sets one questioning the basic plausibility of *Julia*, especially as the credits refer us not to an autobiography but state rather that the screenplay is 'based on the story by Lillian Hellman'.

Re-reading the piece, one is struck by a passage which suggests that this 'portrait' might have involved something more than a case of the author having as she says 'changed most of the names' to protect the innocent and the guilty: 'I think I have always known about my memory; I know when it is to be trusted and when some dream or fantasy entered on the life, and the dream, the need of dream, led to distortion of what happened . . . But I trust absolutely what I remember about Julia.'

Approached in the light of this statement, it is possible to see the picture as some kind of dream—and this is precisely the way it is presented to us. The truths the film proposes are of an emotional character, determined more by the director's style and the performers who embody them than by the historical context from which they supposedly issue. What *Julia* is about, as a literary work but more especially as a movie, is the sentimental, literary and

political education of Lillian Hellman. The taciturn, unyielding representative of all-American probity, Hammett is there to validate her art—to destroy the unworthy first drafts and then to tell her that *The Children's Hour* is 'the best play anyone's written in a long time.' Julia is the focus of aspiration, the passionate soul motivated by pure altruism to act, suffer and die for humanity, and doomed to rejection by her family in both life and death (her very ashes are spurned). She urges Lillian to cultivate her anger ('I like your anger—don't ever let them talk you out of it'), and names her illegitimate, and lost, daughter, 'Lilly'.

We know Hammett to be real, of course, but what we know of him is largely the man Miss Hellman has created, so that in the morality play that is her autobiographical trilogy he exists in the same imaginative dimension as Julia, who could quite easily be a projection of Miss Hellman's fantasies. In this reading Julia would be the beautiful playmate that every lonely child creates, who became the sacrificial victim of intolerance and insensitivity, her death indicting with equal vehemence America and Europe, and thus justifying Miss Hellman's otherwise unmotivated isolation and unfocused anger.

For a fable or allegory then, the casting has a certain inevitability. The muddled, emotional radical Lilly is perfectly embodied by the tough, pragmatic Jane Fonda, a heroine in the American grain; the aristocratic, elusive Julia is exactly portrayed by the ethereal, cosmopolitan ideologue Vanessa Redgrave. Equally, Fred Zinnemann has been 'cast' as director; *Julia* calls for a well-meaning liberal film-maker arrested stylistically and emotionally in the Popular Front period of the 1930s and 40s. Moreover with some insight the producers engaged as lighting cameraman Douglas Slocombe, a cinematographer who time and again for more than thirty years has proved adept at realising dreams and dream worlds (*Dead of Night*, *Savaband for Dead Lovers*, *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, *Freud*, *The Servant*, *Travels With My Aunt*). And if that were not enough, Georges Delerue has provided an elegiac score that is the aural equivalent of looking at the world through the wrong end of a telescope.

Julia begins and ends on an image of Lillian as a woman apart, fishing at a remote winter lake, thinking about her life and stoically

glorying in her solitary rectitude. Only with the tutelary figures of Hammett and Julia can she make contact; virtually everyone else is irredeemably corrupt—among them, the upper-class alcoholic whom she knocks out for suggesting that her relationship with Julia is an unnatural one (there's an explicit link here to *The Children's Hour*); Dorothy Parker and her epically husband Alan Campbell; Julia's grandparents and servants. In contrast the eponymous heroine is given every touch of charisma Douglas Slocombe's lamps can provide, either as a 12-year-old in the chronologically earliest flashbacks or as the grown-up Julia, shot through gauze in the student sequences (as an Oxford undergraduate she never seems to set foot in a women's college) and in the Berlin reunion scene with a light projected on to her pupils to make her quite literally starry-eyed.

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie apart, there are few movies with so many levels of dreaming as *Julia*. The whole picture is a hazy meditation, and within that meditation are flashbacks to the dream world of childhood, silent slow-motion images of political violence imagined or remembered, and quite explicit dreams when for instance Lillian has a premonition of Julia's death while nodding off during the graveyard scene in a Moscow Art Theatre production of *Hamlet*, and later when she is haunted by nightmares of her friend's murder.

It is said that when Lillian Hellman saw the dedicated Communist John Howard Lawson's Spanish Civil War movie *Blockade* in 1938, she sneeringly dismissed it, claiming that she couldn't tell one side from the other. The crudities and evasions of *Julia* are of another order. What we are getting ultimately in this picture is not an image of reality, but sentimentalised mythology, that for all its hard-boiled posturing is a cosy apology for Lillian Hellman's life. The movie seeks to set aside forty years of agonising social and political history and replace it with nostalgic romantic melodrama.

PHILIP FRENCH

Padre Padrone

One day a few years after the end of the Second War, a granite-faced man carrying a staff enters the school in the Sardinian village of Siligo and announces that his six-year-old son Gavino will henceforth become a shepherd. Having led the terrified boy away, the man, Efisio Ledda, hearing catcalls, returns and warns the other boys that although today it is Gavino who has been taken, each one of them will one day be compelled to leave their education and serve their fathers. Later, shivering in a pair of shorts, the crop-haired Gavino is abandoned on a mountainside; unable to bear the death-like knell of the enveloping silence, he runs away only to be caught by his waiting father, beaten and sent back to the hut that is to be his home for the next fourteen years. During this time, it seems, Gavino lives entirely alone: his only companions the sheep, an occasional passer-by and a fellow shepherd boy from a rival family. His existence is dominated by a consuming fear of the wrath of his cunning and merciless father.

Drawn from the autobiography of Gavino Ledda, *Padre Padrone* (Artificial Eye) is on one, and perhaps its most effective level the plain tale of the self-education of a brave and tenacious young man. After one humiliatedly unsuccessful attempt to leave Sardinia, Gavino (Saverio Marconi) joins the army; and on the Italian mainland overcomes his illiteracy and the handicap of a barely comprehensible Sardinian dialect to learn radio mechanics and later, with the help of a paid fellow conscript, Latin and Greek. He remains in the army, obtains a high-school diploma and then, against his father's orders, returns to Siligo to study for a university

'Julia': Hammett (Jason Robards) and Hellman (Jane Fonda)



entrance exam. He is still, however, Efisio's bondsman and is again compelled to abandon his studies and to work with his hands in the fields; having failed his exams, Gavino finally finds the will to stand up to his father in the only way the old man understands—by beating him in a trial of physical strength. Later, we are told, Gavino obtains his degree in comparative philology (with a thesis on Sardinian dialects) and settles in Siligo to write his autobiography, not only as a record of his own life but also as a testament to the other boys in his class who were in turn taken by their fathers and set to work before they had learned to read or write.

Shot in grainy, slightly bleached 16 mm colour stock, and subsequently enlarged to 35 mm, *Padre Padrone* is, in keeping with its subject, a raw and unfinished work, jumping without entire success between a number of styles—realistic, fantastic, lyrical and operatic—and in the end leaving a number of questions tantalisingly unanswered. Made originally for television, the film lacks a visual breadth (Gavino's isolation being repeatedly emphasised by a booming knell on the soundtrack rather than by a pan across the mountain), which is one factor that reduces the story from the epic scale which the directors, the brothers Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, clearly intended, to a series of cramped, inward-looking episodes, often most uncertainly spliced together. For a story which spans some twenty years, the spectator gains very little sense of the passage of time (in fact the fourteen years of Gavino's isolation are bridged by a single over-obvious linking cut), almost nothing of the social structure of Sardinia (on which the reason for Efisio's tyranny pivots) and indeed very little sense of Gavino himself—his aspirations, his feelings about his years of solitude and about his mother and the younger siblings for whom his youth was sacrificed.

What the film does very clearly portray is the rigour of the life of a Sardinian peasant family: the necessity for constant vigilance, how this has bred an almost instinctual distrust and an acute responsiveness to nature (Efisio's ears are so finely tuned that he can hear a snake beneath a stone), the impossibility of ever scraping more than an existence from a harsh, infertile land. One cannot but admire Gavino, by the end of the film, for having overcome the constraints of the life into which he was born—even though, ironically, it was by bending so studiously to another set of illiberal rules, those of the Italian army. The film also conveys a clear sense of the destructibility of the rural poor: when snow kills the olive grove that Efisio has bought from the widow of a murdered relative and which he hopes will free the family from the life of landless shepherds, there is a subtle and touching scene in which the family—led by Gavino's mother—makes the best of the cold by eating frozen sheep's milk sweetened with syrup.

Gavino Ledda has described the composition of his autobiography as a 'liberating experience'; and the Tavianis' film likewise expresses the exhilaration of intellectual liberation. However, so much else remains worryingly repressed and unresolved (Gavino himself, who appears in a prologue and epilogue, is last seen rocking backwards and forwards, still apparently scarred by his childhood memories), that one is left mainly looking forward to a sequel. Ledda's second book, which he is in the process of completing, is not a straightforward continuation of the first, 'but an exploration of the man who, having acquired the code of language, makes use of it to describe what surrounds him.' Sardinia itself is Ledda's new protagonist: 'its men, the old shepherds who struggle to communicate their myths and traditions... the monsters they carry inside themselves.' This is the intriguing and enlightening story behind Gavino's struggle. *Padre Padrone* is the story of how Gavino learned to express himself; just what he has learned to express remains to be revealed.

JOHN PYM



Paula Sheppard (Alice) in 'Communion'

Communion and Martin

After a ferocious account of its teenage hero's bloodlust in a railway compartment, where he slashes a girl's wrist and drinks her blood in unambiguous sexual ecstasy, George A. Romero's *Martin* (Oppidan) opens with an apprehension of divine retribution. As the train pulls into the station, an old man (Lincoln Maazel), snowy-bearded and immaculately garbed in white, is waiting. 'We have another train to catch,' he snaps at the downcast boy; and unspeaking, the discreet distance of saint and sinner maintained between them, they wait alone in the no man's land of the deserted railway platform.

Alongside the credits of Alfred Sole's *Communion* (Hemdale), while we hear the whispered mutter of prayer, the image of a girl veiled for first communion with a gold crucifix (in fact, as we see, a dagger) in her demurely gloved hands. Then Father Tom (Rudolph Willrich) welcomes Catherine Spages (Linda Miller) and her two daughters to the rectory. While eight-year-old Karen ('Did you make a good confession?') is rewarded for her imminent first communion with cookies and a crucifix of her very own, her older sister Alice ('You nasty child!') wanders the house in a monster mask, frightening the housekeeper. And when, with the congregation assembled on the day of the first communion, smoke curling from an oak chest leads to the discovery of Karen's charred and blood-boltered body, all the evidence naturally points to Alice as the culprit.

Angels and demons, in other words, are manifestly going to walk both films. And so they do, though hardly in the forms we are led to expect by the teasing intimations in each film of, respectively, *Dracula* and *The Exorcist*. 'Nosferatu!' hisses the old man as he shows his nephew Martin (John Amplas) the garlic-hung room he is to occupy in the family home; but as Martin promptly demonstrates by ripping away the garlic and annexing his uncle's protective crucifix with impunity, the old magic simply doesn't work any more. While in *Communion* the Church, confident of its ability to exorcise demons, precipitates further disaster by its failure to realise that it is this very confidence that created the demons in the first place.

With superbly insolent skill, *Communion*

plays the Hitchcock game to the hilt as the diminutive figure of the killer in a hooded yellow oilskin and flesh-pink mask pursues its path of vengeance, while red herrings multiply in semblances of culpability for the protestingly innocent Alice. The shock of the shower-bath from *Psycho* is recreated on a staircase as Alice's hostile aunt is repeatedly stabbed in the legs by an assailant erupting from the basement. The hallucinating identity confusions of *Vertigo* reappear in a sequence where, answering a mysterious telephone call, Alice's father pursues a figure purporting to be his possibly guilty niece, transformed in his mind into his daughter, but actually the murderer, trapping him into a death as painfully prolonged as the one in *Torn Curtain*. And *I Confess* looms in an ironic theological turnabout when the murderer, before being allowed to transfer the burden of guilt to the priest, receives for her long history of piety a vague absolution that leaves her free to continue the Lord's work by murdering with a clear conscience.

Gradually, or more specifically in retrospect from the final shot suggesting a transference between the murderer and Alice, the pattern of purpose behind this display of horror-suspense pyrotechnics begins to emerge in the revelation of a skull beneath the skin. The opening scenes in the rectory and the Spages home are redolent of Christian benevolence and middle-class domesticity, seemingly troubled only by Alice's intransigent truculence. An imbalance, however, is already suggested by pertinent domestic groupings in the rectory (Father Tom, Mrs. Spages and Karen like a happy family around the dining-room table), which contrasts markedly with the shattered tranquillity of the Spages home as mother (in the absence of a divorced father) wearily tries to paper over the personality conflict between her daughters that rages from room to room.

Although Father Tom's position as a substitute husband is clearly innocent of any conscious (probably even unconscious) attraction on either his part or that of Mrs. Spages, its catalytic importance is revealed when, just before her discovery and arrest, the killer—the elderly housekeeper who has appointed herself mother superior to a succession of parish priests—points an accusing finger and a venomous 'Whore!' at Mrs. Spages. An unfounded accusation, as far as we are able to



'Welcome to L.A.': Keith Carradine, Geraldine Chaplin

judge, yet one given its own foundation by three isolated shots that unobtrusively tell another story from her viewpoint. First the pair of embraces, virtually mirror images of each other, as the distraught Mrs. Spages is consoled in turn by Father Tom and by her ex-husband; then, edging like a dagger between them, the photographs glimpsed in the housekeeper's room: a diptych frame with, on the right, the housekeeper and her own long-dead child, and on the left, occupying the husband's place, her surrogate child Father Tom.

Frustrated or repressed sexuality may be the villain of the piece, but Alfred Sole is concerned to take the matter further. Lurking behind the bland façade of the rectory, we discover a very old Monsignore, still nominally in charge of the parish though now rambling in his wits; and across the hallway from the Spages apartment, the monstrously obese landlord, living in indescribably lewd squalor with a horde of pet cats while an ancient gramophone grinds out nostalgic intimations of romantic frustration. Although arguably a trifle too consciously grotesque to merge comfortably with the rest of the film, these two characters undeniably act as powerful extensions to its theme. Menaced on the one hand by a Church in its dotage urging submission on pain of hellfire, and on the other by a corrupt society assuming eagerness to participate in its secret vices, the unhappy Alice—last seen furtively appropriating the killer's knife—almost inevitably takes over where her predecessor left off.

Much less assured than *Communion*, *Martin* is as electrically raw-edged as Romero's earlier *Night of the Living Dead*. Where that film achieved its minatory charge mainly by driving its proposition to a ruthlessly logical conclusion, *Martin* diversifies. On the one hand there is the wry challenge to genre assumptions, with *Martin* (and the film itself in a series of rather clumsy black-and-white inserts) poking fun at film lore, at one scarily absurd moment even swirling through the nocturnal streets in the obligatory outfit of black-winged cloak and joke-shop incisors. On the other, the reassuringly familiar settings in a suburb of Pittsburgh where the uncle owns a delicatessen, and where the clash of two worlds—the crumbling desolation of the immigrant ghetto and the mod. con. refinements of the residential area invaded by *Martin* for a bout of blood-letting—makes its own unforced comment.

In this context, Martin's problem is presented tellingly as deriving from adolescent hesitancy about sex, exacerbated by the social malaise surrounding him (reference to the Manson murders is very much in order). Although well on the way to self-exorcism after his discovery of normal sexual ecstasies with a sympathetically available woman, his 'vampirism' is meanwhile being subjected to traditional remedies by his uncle, who persuades (in neat mockery of *The Exorcist*) an amiably bleating old priest to mumble an exorcism ceremony. Naturally this fails, and the equally traditional answer is a stake through the heart.

Much of the charge here, questioning the validity of justice and capital punishment for 'monsters', is unfortunately undermined by the film's failure to confront (let alone resolve) the paradox presented by its rationalisation of the vampire myths. Having his cake and eating it, as it were, Romero characterises his hero simultaneously as a troubled teenager and as an age-old vampire kept youthful by infusions of blood. Message-wise, at least, the two characterisations tend to be mutually exclusive.

TOM MILNE

Welcome to L.A.

After three years in London, Carroll (Keith Carradine) returns to his native Los Angeles to attend the recording of an album of his work by the celebrated singer Eric Wood. Told that Eric does not want him present, Carroll takes to driving about the city, dulling a hazy commitment to both it and its inhabitants by swigging half-pint bottles of Southern Comfort. This urban society of seemingly unbounded promiscuity offers insufficient satisfaction, however, to free him from a past he had abandoned: his agent Susan Moore (Viveca Lindfors) expects a return on long-forgotten sexual favours, and his father Carl Barber (Denver Pyle) expects the prodigal to take an interest in the family's prosperous dairy business. In the end, riled by Carroll's philandering, Susan tells him that his return to L.A. was not, as he thought, the result of his own efforts, but had been engineered and financed by herself and Carl. This, and the realisation that the one woman who eluded him had only done so in order to win back her husband, jolts Carroll into taking the first steps towards becoming his

own man. Informed that Eric has left town, he sits down at a studio piano and, with the producer's nod, begins for the first time to record his own songs.

On one level, *Welcome to L.A.* (Lagoon) is a slight, old-fashioned story about a man's delayed progress towards maturity; on another, more interesting and original level, it presents a set of pared down portraits, dovetailed in such a way that the form of the movie is exactly made to match its tone and content. Although the film's fragmented moments are linked by a number of atmospheric bridging passages—notably a panoramic shot of the city through a window in Carroll's rented apartment—the spectator surprisingly gains little sense of Los Angeles as a whole. Ann Goode (Sally Kellerman), the estate agent who handles the apartment, remarks at one point that its inhabitants seem only to comprise the small circle of family members, lovers and business acquaintances who people the film. The fragile narrative dissolves in a series of sharply observed moments which are as deliberately composed as the rich, polite, hedonistic characters for whom they have been set up.

California Split was one of the films on which director Alan Rudolph worked during his extended association with Robert Altman, the producer of *Welcome to L.A.* And, while the latter film bears a greater surface resemblance to *Nashville* (for which Rudolph is credited as co-writer), it is to the earlier story of the hypnotic influence of gambling money that we should perhaps look for the true antecedents of *Welcome to L.A.* Beneath their genial exteriors, all the characters in Rudolph's film are hustling, or if not hustling then have reaped the benefits of their business acumen, found them wanting and are seeking a deeper significance to their lives elsewhere. Carl Barber, in particular, realising that he cannot win back Carroll, creates a surrogate and more faithful son in his assistant Kenneth Hood (Harvey Keitel), whom he elevates to a partnership in the business that Carroll has implicitly rejected. Kenneth in his turn, having achieved the position he craves, finds he now has time—though probably too late—to consider winning back his wife Karen (Geraldine Chaplin), who has throughout the film been attempting to regain his attention through her pathetic adoption of the mannerisms of Greta Garbo's Camille and by her neglect of their children in favour of endless taxi rides around the city.

Money also controls the secondary characters: Susan, the agent past her prime who is reduced to purchasing her sexual pleasures, and Linda (Sissy Spacek), the maid imported into Carroll's apartment, who is just entering her prime and who finds it equally natural to sell her body. Ironically, Susan has control over the one person Linda worships, Eric Wood; but when Carroll finally arranges a meeting, Linda finds him as egocentric as the men who have purchased her favours. Nona (Lauren Hutton) attempts to keep her distance from her lover Carl, by her silence and her professional photography; she retaliates to Carl's philandering by making herself available to his son, only to find that he has as little consideration for her as the man who pays her and beneath an admiring exterior orders her about. The matrix of financial dependence which weaves these characters together lies beneath the surface of *Welcome to L.A.*; what is most immediately striking is the film's visual unity.

Rudolph has claimed Matisse as the inspiration for the film's physical design (and to emphasise the point he has hung a reproduction of a recumbent Matisse woman on the wall of Carroll's apartment). The film's compositions are boxed in; its characters live in bedrooms, offices and recording studios. These are filmed in bright, naturally lit colours, often with vivid contrasts of light and shadow: the characters unconsciously—and sometimes consciously—

pose against their backgrounds. This is twentieth century Lotus-land, and even while Rudolph deplores it he cannot help in some sense being drawn towards its visual beauty—and drawing us with him. The fascination he manages to communicate stems not so much from the intrinsic charms or admirability of his characters but rather from the manner in which their behaviour so exactly meshes with the values and ambience of the society in which they live.

The Altman stock company has rarely been better used, and despite moments of directorial misjudgment (Viveca Lindfors' narcissism is at one point directed straight to the camera), the film has an economy and unity absent from many of Altman's own films. The prevalence and naturalness of mirrored images, the feeling of extreme and guiltless affluence, and of a society in which, if you are not watching somebody else, he is invariably watching and assessing you—all these Rudolph has caught with a remarkable sense of accurate immediacy.

JOHN PYM

LONDON FESTIVAL

Although we go to press too early to report on the London Festival in any detail, six films shown at the Festival are reviewed here—Werner Herzog's 'Stroszek' and 'La Soufrière', James Ivory's 'Roseland', 'Assault on Precinct 13' and 'Rolling Thunder' from the Festival's 'Action Cinema' section, and Frederick Wiseman's 'Canal Zone'. Other Festival films, including Bertolucci's '1900', will be reviewed when they open commercially in London.

Herzog's Magic Mountain

In suitable hot-house conditions, visionary moments come easy: the harder part of the prophet business lies in sustaining that awe-filled exaltation amid the trash and dross of the market place. Even Moses had, eventually, to come down from the mountain and have some of his exalted fire stamped out by clay-footed idolaters. The comparison, though inflated, is not entirely inapposite. Herzog's power as a film-maker has always been primarily a visionary one. Nature, untamed and sometimes even uncharted, has provided the cosmic hot-house in which his awesome visions have best flowered; 'civilisation', where he has treated it, has appeared as an arrogant illusion, a Babel-tower of foolish human ambition; and his heroes, victims of and outcasts from that civilised social norm, have lived their deformed and misshaped lives in some pale, Platonic shadow of the State of Nature. Which state, though awesomely inspiring, is hardly a cheering one. It proclaims the transience, the nothingness of human endeavours, and the greater glory of a universe which yields its secrets only to those who submit to the attraction of its fatal, all-engulfing embrace.

Linking nearly all Herzog's films is a thirst for death, but for death as a pure and transcendental force, a moment of fusion with a superior nature. It is this thirst, and this purity, which elevate the woodcarver Steiner's death-defying ski jumps from the materially competitive to the incalculably mystical. But where the self-sought death is the apotheosis to which all his films advance, Herzog treats as the ultimate irony and indignity death at human hands. Peeling away the foggy layers of intellectual confusion, one finds, at the glassy heart of all his films, gratuitousness as the single value he consistently celebrates: in his state of nature, motivation is the one cardinal sin.

At any rate, it seems an act of perfect consequence that Herzog, on learning that the volcano La Soufrière was about to erupt and that one local inhabitant had refused to join in

the evacuation from the island of Guadeloupe, should promptly have set off to film the eruption and the last inhabitant. The filming of *La Soufrière*, even more than of *Aguirre*, represents an act of physical recklessness that confers on its maker a wished-for equality with his subject; the danger of his, and the camera's, presence extracts a grim, at times unbearable, suspense from even the most static shots of empty landscapes and apparent inactivity. Death is, literally, in the air, and the message of the sulphurous exhalations drifting in beautiful, lethal clouds across the mountainside is modulated in Herzog's distinctively unaccented commentary, whose litanic chant is further echoed in the film's more overtly religious music.

In the event, *La Soufrière* proves, in Herzog's own words, to be a record of 'an inevitable catastrophe which didn't happen.' His disappointment, balancing his fear, contributes to the film's air of other-worldliness, ultimately reinforcing its strength, its sheer gratuitousness. The deserted town, its streets patrolled by dogs too hungry to bark, serves as a mute monument to the folly of human ambition; the unapproachable crevice on the mountain-top becomes a magnetic force, drawing the film crew towards its noxious embrace; the last inhabitant proves to be not one man but three, all of them blacks, all of them so exploited by a greedy civilisation that they have nothing to live for and hence no fear of dying.

It is here that the disquieting moral ambivalence of all Herzog's work comes most sharply into focus: the old man, stretched out with his cat to die on the grassy mountainside, is offered at once as an object for emulation and for indignation. By staying *gratuitously*, he becomes not a martyr but a hero; but for the earlier generation (on the neighbouring island of Martinique) which stayed for something, namely an election, Herzog reserves his finest irony. The moral is labyrinthine and confused, but the vision is hypnotic, powerful and persuasive. Even the presence of the film crew, honestly recorded, proves barely intrusive, since they attempt, not to modify the situation, but rather to succumb to its inevitable force.

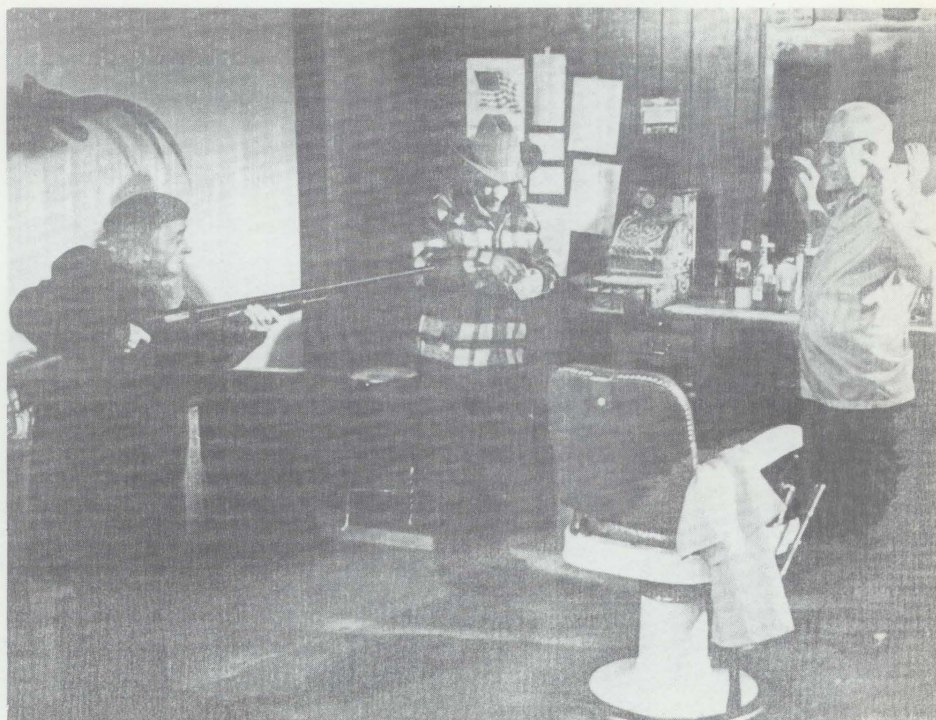
Stroszek (Contemporary), on the other hand, attempts to leap from the sublime to the ridiculous. Of all Herzog's films it appears the one most calculated to please. It places humanity rather than nature in the centre of the screen, and sets its humans down in mean city streets

and arid wastelands whose muddy monotony is relieved only by mobile homes (perhaps the ultimate metaphor for the transience of human constructions) and pre-fabricated out-buildings. The closest the film comes to a moment of exaltation is when its three naive misfits contemplate the view from the Empire State. Some thousand miles of flat lands later, after acres of junk food, jerry-building and clapped out automobiles, one of the three reaches another high point, a mountain on an Indian reservation in Wisconsin—the mountainside is cluttered, not only by a funicular railway that takes the sightseer in pointless circles, but also by an amusement arcade filled with dancing chickens and musical ducks, and by craft shops where the natives sell the mass-produced versions of their traditional wares. In the parking lot at the base, a lone Cherokee stands watch in full warrior costume.

Stroszek is, both literally and figuratively, a film about prostitution; and in its recourse to facile irony and no less facile sentimentality it comes perilously close to partaking of what it denounces (Henry James—of course—had a phrase for it: 'the age of trash triumphant'). The film begins in Berlin, where Bruno S. (this time, it's S for Stroszek), on his release from prison, forms an unlikely alliance with a street-walker called Eva who is being brutalised by her pimp. The opening scenes might belong in a Fassbinder melodrama, were it not for Herzog's determination to compel us into an affection for his characters that is inevitably patronising. For these big-hearted victims (Bruno, the girl and an elderly neighbour) are set up to represent the little people, and their colourful eccentricity is that of the Gallic courtyard comedy. If Bruno's speech and appearance are as startling as they were in *Kaspar Hauser*, Herzog has none the less diminished the credibility of his victim/hero by giving him a girlfriend, companions, a concerned neighbour; and by having him uncynical enough about man's inhumanity to believe that America may still be the promised land.

Yet although the film's ideas might best be described as elementary, and although it frequently treats its characters with a condescending cuteness, *Stroszek* works as a powerful argument on the level of its images. The 60-foot trailer, the lone Indian, the dancing chicken, the funicular, provide an effective emblematic critique of our trashy society. They also have a

'Stroszek': Clemens Scheitz and Bruno S. imitating an American tradition



persuasiveness that the fictional characters lack. The metaphysical, this time, takes a back seat to the social and the ephemeral. Herzog's transatlantic fable proves a worldly *divertissement*, after which one can only hope he will, like Moses, go back up the mountain.

JAN DAWSON

Roseland

One of the likeable things about Ismail Merchant and James Ivory as film-makers is their wandering habit of mind. Somehow they keep finding funds for new and not obviously commercial enterprises, having in the last few years made films in three continents; and if they are liable to turn up almost anywhere, they also hold to this sense of a roving commission in the varied formats of their work. It may be a virtue of the Indian-American partnership, with further flavours of internationalism usually added by way of writers and cameramen, that they appear to see all their subjects from a slightly oblique, even distinctively unattached viewpoint. They are snappers up of themes and scenes disregarded by more rooted film-makers. Not that serendipity, the essayist's gift, has prevented James Ivory from homing in on a certain style of subject. His taste, as often as not, is for the slightly decayed or the gallantly outmoded: the great, quiet house in *Savages*, waiting to master its invaders; the travelling players of *Shakespeare Wallah*, relics of the fading Raj; or the Kensington exiles in *Autobiography of a Princess*, surviving on reminiscence and buttered toast.

Given Ivory's temperament, their new film *Roseland*, which is about the famous New York dance-hall, was bound to see the place as something of a haunted ballroom, a focus for misty recollections and illusory endeavours. With its gilt and mirrors, its long dark bars and solid staircases, it has the decor and style of some beached ocean liner of the 1930s; which, in turn, makes it a suitable setting for stories which see its patrons rather as though they were passengers, passing through the place and caught briefly under the spotlight of Ruth Praver Jhabvala's script. That, certainly, is the tone set in the first of the three anecdotes which make up the film—an old-fashioned trifle, a shade too winsome, about a widow who hangs around the ballroom mourning her dancing days with her late husband, until she comes to an O. Henryish realisation that other people also

have memories. The tale is sugared in its telling, as the lady sees her dancing reflections from the past, but is winningly played by Teresa Wright—once even more powerfully haunted, one is bound to remember, by the Merry Widow waltz, the signature tune of her loving, dangerous Uncle Charlie—and by Lou Jacobi.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala plays herself in, as it were, with this sketch; the exceptional precision of touch, always a mark of her writing at its best, makes itself felt in the second story, the meat in the sandwich of the film's three episodes. This concerns a gigolo (Christopher Walken), the rich, invalid woman (Joan Copeland) who maintains him in the soft style to which he's become accustomed, and the independent girl who persuades herself, against the evidence of her own and everyone else's senses, that somewhere inside this cosseted, beautifully mannered lapdog there's a more forceful man waiting to be released by her resolution. Geraldine Chaplin plays this part with a controlled, egotistical wistfulness which is in effect the mood of the film—the mood, the script implies, which *Roseland* exists to satisfy. The three central characters, and the dancing teacher (Helen Gallagher) who knows them a little better than they know themselves, are part of a continuing pattern of illusions. Geraldine Chaplin breaks the rules by failing to see the varnish, a kind of nominal concern for other people's interests, that holds the surface together. This subtle little story, playing on a narrow range of temperament, sees a place as part of a state of mind. Why do they all come to *Roseland*? To play out a story that belongs there.

From here, it's a natural step to the third tale, a return to the ageing and the more overtly lonely, about an ill-assorted but tenacious pair of dancing partners—an exuberant, confiding, tireless Middle European (Lilia Skala) and a fumbling, stumbling, resolutely polite old man (David Thomas)—and their efforts to win the Peabody Champagne Hour contest. The Peabody, a barman dourly comments, is altogether too much for the old-timers; and it's evident that it is going to be fairly lethal for this couple, although not in the most predictable way. In the domineering life force role, which is for much of its length a virtual monologue, Lilia Skala does everything except start taking bites out of the scenery; that the performance remains vivid, sympathetic and very funny is a tribute to its total confidence—and to the felicity of Ruth Jhabvala's phrasing.

A scriptwriter Polish by birth and Indian by

marriage, who has made her name as a novelist of the Anglo-Indian experience, might seem an unlikely interpreter for an all-American institution. But *Roseland*, in Ruth Jhabvala's expert hands, is in a sense timeless and unlocalised, a focus for the bright, strained smiles of elderly women, puffing up the stairs to embark on the hazardous Peabody, and for the soft, practised watchfulness of smooth and not so young men. The sense of isolation is perhaps rather stronger than was intended, in that the film was evidently shot to a demanding tight schedule, with the actors having to clear out before the real customers arrived, and with some necessary parsimony in the supply of extras. Far from the crowded ballrooms of *New York, New York*, the feeling here is of unpeopled space around the edges of the stories. James Ivory perhaps missed a trick in not at least contriving a suggestion that the protagonists of one story are walking on in the background of another. But if different conditions of shooting, or a little more time, might have yielded a more documented sense of the place itself, *Roseland* still has the measure of its setting. Ivory is a film-maker who reacts strongly to locations; and in retrospect his films define themselves in terms of an aptness of relation between people and places, the past usually taking a strong hold on the present. In *Roseland*, appropriately, the ironic imagination plays on old tunes.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

Assault on Precinct 13 and Rolling Thunder

The boom in Hollywood nostalgia seems to have peaked in some areas (Bogdanovich's recent failures) while still gaining strength in others (the genre-plundering of *Star Wars*). At a grass roots level, however, in low-budget and independent American feature-making, movie puns and parodies remain a rich source of inspiration, usually linked with the directness and energy with which these films exploit social and historical (as well as movie-derived) situations. Part and parcel of this stylistic élan, of course, is a cynicism of content: no theme or topic is so complex that it cannot be reduced to some basic confrontation—which frequently gives these films a power and drive lacking in their more cautious big-studio counterparts, but also a tendency to wear out subject matter as fast as they do tyre rubber.

The best of a batch of such films at the London Festival, *Assault on Precinct 13*, the second feature of film school graduate John Carpenter, and George Romero's *Martin*, attack movie clichés with vampiric glee. In the process, they pound their ostensible subjects—the urban guerrilla and the disturbed adolescent—to oblivion with a raucous, melodramatic black humour. Though both fairly bubble with tongue-in-cheek audacity, and some startling visual and dramatic coups, they are scarcely flawless or even very integrated works. Basically, *Martin* twists and turns in pursuit of a medley of ideas with little overall control, while *Precinct 13* is filled with delectable bits of business in direction and performances but seems under-subscribed at the level of the script and basic ideas. Interestingly, *Rolling Thunder* turns up as a sleeker, machine-tooled variation on the same formula, Hollywood's attempt to bridge the generation gap with its wayward progeny. Certainly, Paul Schrader's script suggests a deliberate slumming, as he borrows from his borrowings in *Taxi Driver* and strips every icon and action in that film of its romantic and/or religious pretensions to give full brutal force to the plot.

For all its violence, the motive power of *Assault on Precinct 13* is a kind of playfulness. In fact, until his parody of *Rio Bravo* begins to come together after the first half-hour—as the major characters are besieged inside a derelict

'Roseland': Lilia Skala and Don Denatale

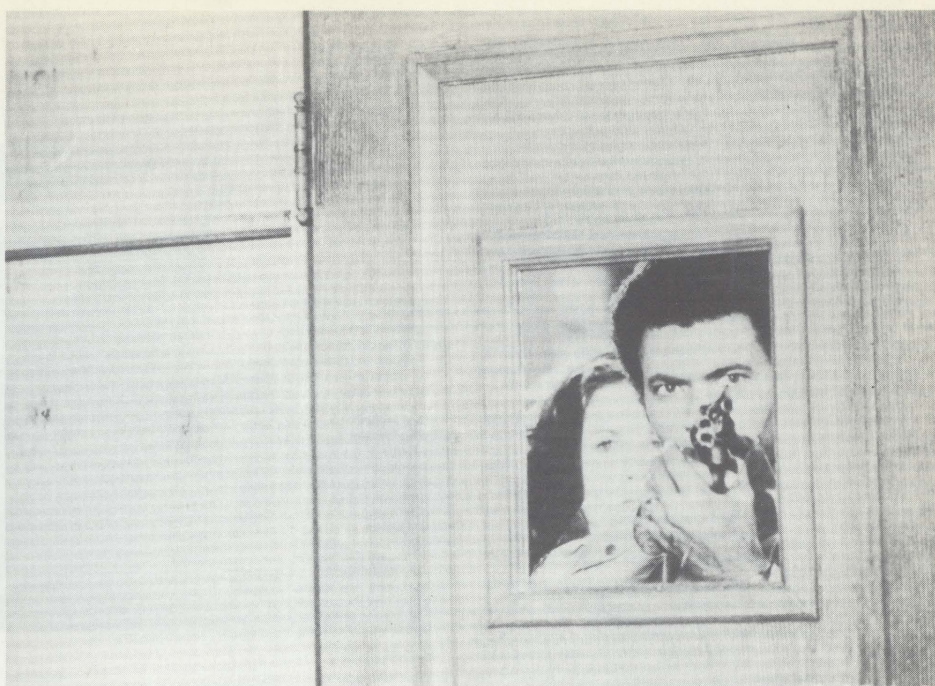


police station by anonymous street marauders—Carpenter seems to be lost in passages of listless exposition. This is disconcerting, given the conciseness of *Dark Star*, the first feature he began at USC film school and which managed both to rib 2001 and to remain idiosyncratically its own film. After pursuing diverse character threads, the plot here is finally triggered in a sequence of considerable flair and malicious irony, involving a small girl and an ice cream and a band of roving terrorists, known as 'Street Thunder' we are told by a police spokesman in a harried, declamatory prologue that has a fittingly 50s air. Thereafter the urban guerrilla/law and order confrontation becomes a rather elaborate blind, useful for throwing some good citizens together in the Hawksian testing ground of the old station house, but only self-consciously used by Carpenter for screwing up the tension of the odd sequence or for the episode of extravagantly zesty gunplay as the enemy make their one sustained charge.

After the little girl's father has exacted vigilante justice against a member of the gang, he flees to the Precinct 13 building, vulnerably isolated in an unprepossessing Los Angeles suburb, and with a much ignored cardboard sign in front announcing that the precinct has moved to other quarters. Inside he finds a black lieutenant, Ethan Bishop (Austin Stoker), who on his first night as street commander has been assigned to supervise the closing down of the station, and a skeleton staff which includes a lady, Leigh (Laurie Zimmer), more sardonically tight-lipped and unflinching in the face of pain than any Hawks heroine. Passing through on his way to a death cell is notorious criminal 'Napoleon' Wilson (Darwin Joston), who will eventually play Dean Martin to Bishop's John Wayne, and a black convict, Wells, who perhaps combines Ricky Nelson with Walter Brennan. One of the film's minor eccentricities is that its parody is at moments crisply precise and at others oddly diffuse: what, for instance, given that the hero's name is Ethan, is Ford's Wayne doing in a Hawks film?

Having established 'Street Thunder' as a realistic threat, Carpenter allows them to drift back into the realm of paranoid nightmare, of a vaguely dispossessed urban mix, with the initial gang members joined by a shadowy multitude as the action progresses and the final battle invoking old Hollywood set-tos with an interchangeable black-yellow-red peril. Similarly, that Wilson, as an old-fashioned emperor of crime, finds himself allied with the police against this new barbarism proves less significant than it first appears. Carpenter is too busy enjoying his Hawks-ish characters and epigrammatic exchanges to sustain this outrageous situation at all levels, but in that area at least he is undeniably successful: from the conception of Wilson as an overgrown and self-satisfied adolescent, too winning ever to be credible as a maniac killer, to the recapitulation of the 'blood in the beer' from *Rio Bravo*, when two patrolmen find a murdered telephone linesman as his blood drips on to their car-top. The one worry prompted by such cool and mocking homage, especially following the more arresting conceits of *Dark Star*, is that Carpenter could fall victim to creeping Bogdanovichism.

Paul Schrader, on the other hand, seems already to have succumbed to a paralysed narcissism. His cinephile enthusiasms, which have run to simply but powerfully motivated blood and thunder plots, graced with metaphysical ironies ranging from Bresson to Hitchcock, have locked in *Rolling Thunder* on the most primitive, exploitative level. Ex-Vietnam POW Charles Rane (William Devane) returns home to San Antonio, Texas, and discovers that his wife wants to leave him for his best friend. However, a gang of thugs erupt into his home in search of one of his valuable coming home gifts, beat and torture him (prompting some flashback allusions to how he endured similar treatment in Vietnam) and leave with the loot after shooting



'Assault on Precinct 13'

his wife and child. Putting himself into training to streamline his newly acquired artificial hand into a lethal weapon, Rane sets off in pursuit with a Vietnam buddy (Tommy Lee Jones) more obviously traumatised by the war.

The most revealing thing about this concoction is neither its emotionally over-driven construction, nor its rampaging gratuitous violence, but Schrader's clear grinding down of the ingredients of 'serious' movies like *Taxi Driver*. In this respect, *Rolling Thunder* is actually of a different species from *Martin* and *Assault on Precinct 13*. Its movie lore is channelled into the creation of one sustained, gut-wrenching effect, where the pleasures of the other films are more diffuse—their creativity served rather than exhausted by their multiple allusions and borrowings. The collaboration of Schrader and director John Flynn actually fits with Hollywood's standard, carbon-copying processes, along with such low-grade genre rip-offs as Robert Clouse's *The Pack* and any number of television series at a further, diluted end of the spectrum.

RICHARD COMBS

Canal Zone

A giant crane dredges up landslide debris, shifting the rock, Sisyphuslike, to one side of the Panama Canal. Large ships make their way slowly up the 50-mile passage, navigated by special Canal pilots—Americans who control the movement and finance of this valuable but increasingly obsolete asset. *Canal Zone* is Frederick Wiseman's latest examination of the mechanisms of political and social control. The first in a new 5-year, 5-film series funded by New York Educational TV's Channel 13, the film focuses on what the Americans have brought to Panama.

Over a languorous three hours, the film shows Middle America *in vitro*: beehive hair styles, short skirts, adult scout movements and fashion shows buttress a sturdy patriotism which is itself a product of distance and homesickness. Wiseman's careful eye picks out some of the ambiguities of exile: Americans living in a colony of sorts in the Bicentennial year when the United States was celebrating its own overthrow of colonial status. The flags and buildings stand out sharply against a tropical landscape. The camera moves easily over the open, relatively unpopulated scenery—expansive

lawns, banana plantations, the white, wide streets of the Third World.

Canal Zone is also a deliberate summation of Wiseman's previous work. 'It's a film that recapitulates all the other films I've done because I touch on every subject matter, and in a sense it's suggesting that if you want to know more about the police, see *Law and Order*. If you want to know more about hospitals, see *Hospital*. If you want to know more about the army, see *Basic Training*.' Its slow pace encourages the audience to consider Wiseman's long-standing preoccupation with the way institutions preserve order by demanding individual obedience. Wiseman avoids 'one-liners'. He says that 'I want each audience to evaluate the ambiguities of ordinary life for itself.'

A lawyer by training and an experienced researcher in the 60s into U.S. Government poverty programmes, Wiseman refers to himself as a 'natural historian'. By revealing the complexity of workaday events, the documentaries force him to work out a personal tension as each new project collides with his previously held ideas. Research begins with the filming, or in this case with an unusual 3-day period he spent in the Zone prior to the five weeks of shooting. Editing is painstaking, and Wiseman's 16:1 ratio on *Canal Zone* is modest compared with the 25:1 and 30:1 ratio of earlier films.

Canal Zone provides few facts to guide the uninitiated through the mechanics of American control of this valuable waterway: the size and strategic worth of its military bases, and the terms of the new treaty which was being formulated while Wiseman was filming in 1976, and which will in three years turn over the civilian administration of the Zone to the Panamanians and by the year 2000 give them control of the canal (with the U.S. still preserving its military bases).

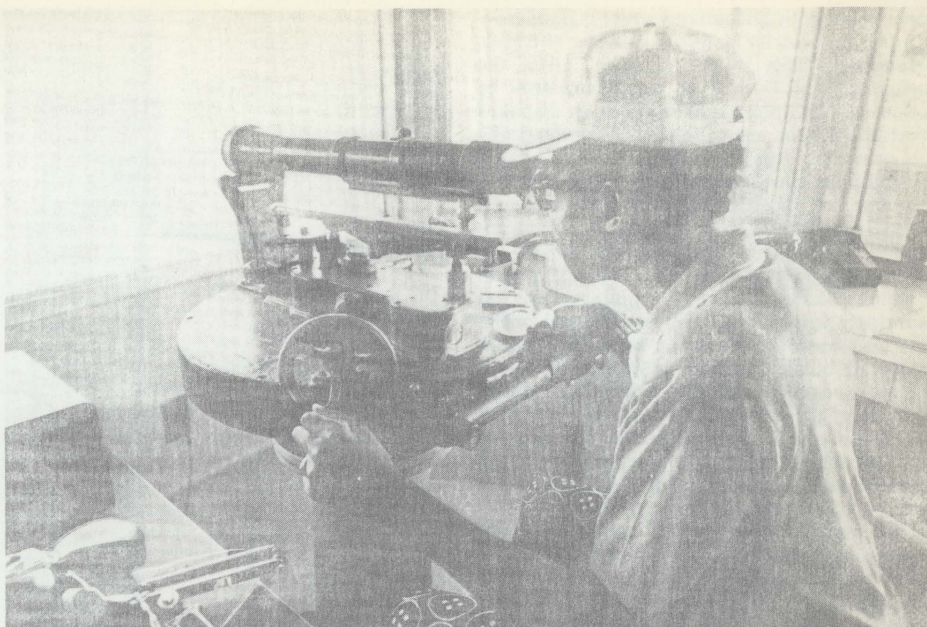
Wiseman edits sequences to reveal concentric circles of control. The national government in Washington directs local policy and locals are seen turning to Washington in the 1976 crisis of transition; multiple agencies create and sustain the environment of small town America—the police, clinics, media, church, social events, courts, rites of passage (a high school graduation). Custom, as well as law, enforces ritual and ideology as Law Day is observed; Memorial Day commemorates the Americans who died building and fighting for the Canal, without questioning whether the fight was necessary or just.

Respectful of ambiguities, Wiseman brings a

compassionate as well as a critical eye to the Canal Zone. Drawn to society's victims, he focuses on a wide range of flotsam and jetsam: hapless white oxen are roped and dragged into waiting vehicles; poor Panamanians are often shown in servile positions, folding seats for an assembly or pushing the buttons which control the targets on a rifle range. A Panamanian pulls a mechanised lawn-mower with a rope, providing a concise picture of industrial transition. The same Panamanians emulate the Americans, take picnics wearing Western dress and watch their children play baseball in the park. Then, too, there are the inequalities within the American community: at a public meeting, an angry speaker claims that the military regard civilians as 'second-class citizens'.

Wiseman ably demonstrates the complex system of values and symbols which wed self to community. The unexamined but much felt ideology is emphasised at public functions: obedience, hard work, toughness (officials at Law Day); sacrifice, hard work (Memorial Day); do-it-yourself, self-reliance (the awards ceremony for the adult scout movement; the fashion show); friendship, tenacity, a belief in being best (the high school commencement speakers); marital fidelity and harmony, faith in religion (the Protestant minister at Sunday service). To dismiss or ridicule the rhetoric of these speakers is to miss the wider context of which Wiseman is acutely aware. As the preacher singles out Women's Lib as a threat from the pit of hell to the institution of marriage, a trusting couple watch, arms entwined, a child sleeping on their shoulders; a young boy clearly too young to be married raptly takes in the minister's talk of renewing marital vows. Wiseman's gift is to reveal the connection between general language and specific sympathetic responses—the process of 'socialisation' which explains how people can be united by an abstract idea, a sense of community which helps sustain them in times of personal crisis and here during the larger trauma of a transfer of power.

Wiseman is particularly adept at showing



'Canal Zone'

how language can reveal what it is intended to conceal. Technical, impersonal jargon guides ships through the canal, the control of which is heavily fraught with political and economic implications. Later, in a memorable scene, a ham operator makes contact with a stranger 3,000 miles away. In between ham signals, beeps and bluff, he talks about his life and his isolation. About to retire for a second time at 55 (having earlier retired from the Navy and come to Panama as the only place where he could bring his family and also be at sea and on land at the same time), he sums up the prospect glibly but painfully as a time 'to drown worms, swat flies, tell lies . . .' Wiseman shows him sitting alone with his equipment, talking in a matter-of-fact way about loneliness. His position

becomes indicative of a kind of abandonment which faces everyone at moments when decisions are out of their hands, and Wiseman clearly intends that this sequence should be integrated with more fundamental questions of decision-making.

By revealing how individuals are not entirely contained by the rules and laws of institutions, Wiseman repeatedly returns the audience to the gap between individual and institutional requirements, the point where socialisation remains incomplete. The audience is invited to reinterpret events in terms of its own experience. *Canal Zone* generates questions and leaves the attentive, uncynical viewer, like the participants, profoundly disquieted.

LOUISE SWEET



DOMINIQUE NOGUEZ, *Le Cinéma autrement* (10/18 U.G.E., 1977)

CLAUDINE EIZYKMAN, *La Jouissance-cinéma* (10/18 U.G.E., 1976)

ANNIE GOLDMANN, *Cinéma et société moderne* (Mediations, Denoël/Gonthier, 1974)

As a general rule, French film criticism has been favourably received in Britain: Mitry, Bazin and Noël Burch have been translated and absorbed, and successive generations have assimilated *Cahiers du Cinéma* and Christian Metz thanks to *Movie* and *Screen*. So far French critics have encountered few cultural barriers, since their work has been dominated by a broad concern with the aesthetics and ontology of the cinema tradi-

tionally conceived in supra-national terms. When some limitation of the global field proved necessary in order to make it manageable, Hollywood was, in France as elsewhere, taken as a provisional norm by which all else could be measured: the most capital intensive of all national industries whose products were most widely marketed could be a 'universal' referent for critics and *nouvelle vague* directors alike. Thus it is only quite recently in France, *a fortiori* in Britain, that film criticism has been approached from a more specifically national point of view.

Of the three authors whose books are reviewed here, only Annie Goldmann explicitly places her enquiry within this framework, and in so doing exposes methodological problems which partly account for

the reticence of the other two. It is nevertheless the case that what underlies both Noguez' *Le Cinéma autrement* and Eizykman's *La Jouissance-cinéma* is the desire to question, if only obliquely, the workings of a national industry whose productions may now be seen as relatively homogeneous. This is why these books, when read together, have a corporate relevance to the British film industry, in addition to their considerable individual qualities.

Dominique Noguez must be one of the first 'academic' film critics to emerge in France. He writes, that is, neither as director of a research team nor contributor to a specialist review, but as a teacher of one of the many university cinema courses which sprang up after 1968. Noguez is both a pedagogue and an empiricist, combining a range of belle-lettriste reference he cannot altogether repress with an unapologetic refusal to be abstruse. In a climate of heavy theorisation, his only diagram is of almost derisive simplicity and shows (p. 48) the place of cinema in a nebulous superstructure—not because Noguez denies the ideological significance of the cinema but because he cannot resist an ironic dig at over-schematic accounts of ideology. It takes a lot of courage to assert that clarity and open-

mindedness are the only critical tenets accepted *a priori*, but if Noguez willingly jettisons factitious intellectual respectability it is because his wit, his racy prose and personal commitment give this book all the conviction it needs.

Much of *Le Cinéma autrement* is made up of articles published elsewhere over the last ten years now reorganised on the lines of Snow's *Wavelength*: an overview of the field where general questions such as 'realism' and 'politics' are discussed; a 'zoom' which gradually narrows this field to a sociological account of a number of films from the last decade; finally a review of some recent productions which have succeeded in eluding the 'dominant cinema' straitjacket. But despite its origin in occasional pieces, the book has a coherence which is provided by its arrangement as much as its content and by the post-1968 period which it addresses. For, as Noguez points out, the last decade has been that of general politicisation of the cinema for reasons which, in France, are not hard to seek. Noguez' own commitments are transparent: he is an old-fashioned socialist and it is one of his endearing qualities that he has no hesitation in, for example, preferring Karmitz' *Coup pour coup* to Godard-Gorin's *Tout va bien* on the grounds that the

former, at least, engages with real workers in a reconstruction of a real lock-out.

But on the politics of the cinema, as opposed to individual films, Noguez is altogether more indirect and more subtle. His model for France might ideally be that of the French Canadian cinema he knows well, where an upsurge of production accompanied (without articulating the relationship more precisely) the growth of a national liberation movement. The cinema, then, might be compared to a state within the State, and the operating model at the back of Noguez' mind must be that of the unification of independent guerrilla raids into a concerted nationalistic attack.

From this point of view it is the relationship between the sociological analyses of Part 2 and the inroads into the 'dominant cinema' discussed in Part 3 that becomes all important. Whether from prudence or modesty, Noguez does not insist on this link, he merely posits a structural relationship by juxtaposition. All the same, it is clear in his section on 'youth', where he talks about films such as *La Chinoise*, Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Yellow Submarine*, *More*, *Lion's Love*, as in the section entitled 'Reflections of France', which hinges on *Playtime*, Gébés' *L'An Ol*, and similar forgotten films of the period, that what is in question is how a society gets the cinema it deserves and how the relationship between the two might be accounted for. Noguez does not describe this any more than he offers a systematic analysis of what the 'dominant cinema' is, but it becomes clear that the different cinema of his title at worst does not exist in France and at best is in stammering infancy in the films of Rivette, Pollet, Eustache and Robbe-Grillet. A different cinema is therefore an independent cinema, and this is much more than a genre: in a utopia it is a way of life.

Both *La Jouissance-cinéma* and *Cinéma et société moderne* take on significance in relation to Noguez since each attempts to account for a part of the cinema spectrum with the sort of methodological investment that Noguez deliberately forswears. Eizykman is an independent film-maker and an associate of one of the recently founded Paris film co-ops. She is thus concerned to establish the distinction between the 'dominant cinema', here defined as *NRI* (narrative-representational-industrial) and the underground and structural film movements. Examples of the latter, with the exception of her own film *Vitesses Women*, are American, Canadian, British, but essentially not French. Here, however, it is the economy of the film (in the Freudian rather than the Marxist sense) which is examined by means of a series of micro-analyses of psychic energy and libidinal flow.

Thus the central section of the book establishes a corpus of seven films (*The Damned*, *Satyricon*, *The Spider's Strategy*, *A Walk with Love and Death*, *THX 1138*, *L'Homme*

qui ment and Medvedkin's *Happiness*) in which the various dispositions of psychic energy are traced with a view towards demonstrating an evolution towards the independent cinema particularly on the part of Robbe-Grillet and George Lucas. Eizykman's approach is predicated on the central proposition that film theory to date has been almost exclusively preoccupied with questions of signification and therefore narrative, and has in consequence been unable or unwilling to look at the independent cinema phenomenon. Thus her first aim is not the relationship between cinema and society but the establishment of a level of analysis which owes much to information theory in its detail. But *La Jouissance-cinéma* is a polemical piece in attempting to breach the consensus whereby criticism of the narrative cinema and production of feature films contemplate each other in mutual admiration. In this sense its preoccupations, though pursued with less wit and greater rigour, are those of *Le Cinéma autrement*.

Annie Goldmann, on the other hand, is an unrepentant sociologist. *Cinéma et société moderne* is not a new book, but because it has recently been reissued in paperback and because it tackles directly a relationship which for Noguez and Eizykman remains implicit, it is both a guide to current interests and, to some extent, an object lesson in prudence. As might be expected, this is genetic structuralism applied to the cinema, in the event the pre-1968 cinema of Godard plus *Morgan*, *The Red Desert*, *Blow-Up*, *Muriel* and *Last Year in Marienbad*. Those films which are not Godard's are held to share the same problematic and thus act as a control. Hence *Morgan*, in a splendidly ethnocentric analysis, is seen as expressing the impossibility of revolution in a world where all revolutions are betrayed, with much the same kind of pessimism as the pre-1968 Godard hero (or heroine) is seen to be manipulated by forces outside his control in a society dominated by technocrats, and not as was the case here, as a demonstration of the impossibility of the English revolution.

For this approach to work, Godard must, in some sense, be the Zola of the 5th Republic with May 1968 as his Dreyfus Affair. And despite the many reservations called forth by Annie Goldmann's insistence that 'discontinuity' of form is a direct expression of a social malaise characteristic of the period, her book is salutary reading for British audiences whose liking for Godard stops in 1968 precisely because his always present social engagement then became insistent.

Although these three books may therefore seem less challenging than the works of more familiar critics whose concerns are less immediately parochial, they are extremely significant when read together. They indicate, first, the felt need to establish in France an independent cinema movement of the kind that exists elsewhere as a

Leslie Halliwell's

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critique of the 'dominant cinema', and in so doing impose a conception of the 'dominant cinema' as something produced by specific decision groups—in this case the French industry. In questioning, however indirectly, the relationship between cinema and society they testify to the dispersal of politics over the whole field, so that making 'militant' films takes on less importance than, for example, examining history as *Cahiers* has done over the same period.

What needs to be said is that none of these books could have been written in Britain for the simple reason that the British film industry's volume of production is too low. Various consequences flow from this fact: on the one hand, 'political' problems are not aired through the cinema as they are elsewhere. To take two recent examples, Tavernier's discussion of socialism in *Spoiled Children*, or the Taviani Brothers' plea for national unity in *Padre Padrone*, are inconceivable in this country. Perhaps this does not matter. But the structural forms of exposition and resolution of social concerns of all kinds are provided by the 'dominant cinema', which is a narrative cinema emanating from a national industry.

Without wishing to deny the extreme variety of the French cinema (or the Italian for that matter), and quite apart from any censorship that may or may not exist, it is clear that it has a homogeneity deriving from budgets, equipment and actors more than from anything else. Annie Goldmann's book

makes clear by default what Noguez and Eizykman discuss only partially, that the narrative cinema creates a historical sensibility. Since the French film industry often serves as the model for the various plans to bail out the British industry, it is important to consider what the results would be. Noguez offers a few hints.

JILL FORBES

HOW TO READ A FILM

By James Monaco

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
£4.25 (paperback only)

For a book as diverse, not to say diffuse, and concerned with laying down as many connections and as few prescriptions as possible, *How to Read a Film* seems inappropriately named. One can see the title's attraction for an author determined to map out the whole terrain of film theory and appreciation, and to construct some sort of primer in basic know-how. It also insists, in the style that has replaced those works which used to link 'film' and 'art' brazenly in their titles, that film is a 'text' that can be 'read' like any other. It remains, however, a misnomer, for though James Monaco proves a proficient and elegant writer when summarising and cataloguing approaches to history and theory, he becomes strangely unfocused when applying these structures to actual films.

In part, the deficiency is the result of the unwieldy task Monaco

has set himself. A subtitle declares this to be 'The Art, Technology, Language, History and Theory of Film and Media', and the surprise is that, in the first three categories at least, the book remains as flexible and suggestive as it does in picking its way through the mass of relations between film and the other arts, art theory, linguistics and semiology. As a cataloguer in this field, Monaco is an excellent critic, lucidly describing film theory from Münsterberg to Metz, and in particular laying out the terminology of the latter with admirable clarity and lack of pretension. As a critic applying himself to the analysis of film, however, he remains a perfunctory cataloguer, and the least satisfying section is that on 'The Shape of Film History'.

Having established the possible approaches to such a history in terms of politics, economics and psychology, and after suggesting some useful qualifications to the usual 'realist vs. expressionist' duality, Monaco proceeds to a quick run-through of the major film-producing countries which inevitably collapses from lack of critical structure or perspective. Distortions and simplifications proliferate, from the small (Looney is assumed to be a mediocre director except when transcribing Harold Pinter) to the large (the 'cinéma d'auteur', instead of being a critical category, is taken to be a specific kind of film said to have 'arrived' in the early 60s). This section is also irritatingly dependent on invoking 'world-wide acclaim' as a way of approving trends and individual figures.

Monaco's investigation seems in danger of expiring hereabouts from sheer lack of breathing space. The lack of connection between the various parts (as Monaco says, they can actually be read in any order) makes for rather sticky going for the reader who is dropped from an explanation of gauges and film stock into a consideration of signs and syntax. Unfortunately, where the book is most intelligent it is also in danger of being least appreciated, because the breakdown of various theories and methodologies is aimed at providing a basic understanding rather than at advancing any critical debate. Since it is best at sifting through what has already been written rather than at examining actual celluloid, the book's title might more accurately be paraphrased as how to read one's way to a film.

RICHARD COMBS

THE MARCH OF TIME, 1935-1951

By Raymond Fielding

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, £9.75

'A fast freight on the high iron of new journalism, the *March of Time* roared through 1930s America, startling the provincials wherever it went. It was noisy and exciting, and the yokel critics who lined up along the right of way to watch it pass didn't always know what to

make of it.' What reads like a vintage Westbrook Van Voorhis commentary to a pre-war *March of Time* is in fact a quote from Raymond Fielding's new book on the American monthly series which revolutionised 30s film journalism. *March of Time* was the natural child of the radio series of the same name and Columbia's *March of the Years*, but the strongest influences upon it were those of *Time* magazine itself and Louis de Rochemont, who headed the series from its inception in 1935 until 1943. After then, *March of Time* declined slowly until its demise in 1951, pressured by television and long since outdated.

A study of its rise and fall was long overdue, and Raymond Fielding has done a good job of reading, looking and listening. I say listening because he has interviewed all the key people involved, from Louis de Rochemont, the series' original and greatest producer-in-chief, to Julien Bryan, the freelance cameraman whose footage formed the basis of *Inside Nazi Germany* (1938). Fielding is clearly well-read in his subject, knows his way around the production files at the U.S. National Archive and, moreover, *likes* the *March of Time*. This gives him an enthusiasm which historians of the British newsreels seem to find hard to muster. He has, of course, the distinct advantage that the pre-war *March of Time* consistently exposed and criticised political corruption, racial persecution and the machinations of the dictators who threatened world peace. By chance, at exactly the same time that these evils were at their most dangerous, a current affairs film series came into being headed by a man who cared little for impartiality and nothing at all for the idea that documentary film should be authentic.

The best exposition of de Rochemont's concept of his series is to be found in Edgar Anstey's comment on *Uncle Sam—the Non-Belligerent*, a 1941 film which had been attacked as war-mongering propaganda: 'Unobjective and partial though it is, this brilliantly photographed film gets near to being a piece of reliable screen history because it attempts no more than the presentation of certain points of view (giving opportunity to both conflicting parties). No history text-book can do more, and film history becomes meaningless when it lays claim to rise superior to such human frailties.'

To the contemporary English reader, brought up on the requirement on British television to be impartial, it may come as a surprise that de Rochemont had the power to propagandise an issue or crucify someone's character and not get put out of business in the ensuing legal action. In the September 2, 1938 issue, *March of Time* featured an attack on Gerald Smith, Huey Long's heir apparent in the corrupt world of Louisiana politics. 'Today, as this mighty demagogue swings from town to town, impressing his personality upon millions of puzzled Americans,

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Time marching on

thoughtful observers wonder if Gerald Smith is a man of destiny—or merely a political windbag temporarily disturbing the peace of the nation.' Smith's suit was settled out of court for \$1.

In the case of Smith, de Rochemont was lucky to have a subject foolish enough to perform for the *March of Time* cameras. He was not always so fortunate, but he had no intention of allowing this to hamper his work. What could not be filmed, was constructed. Art Carney and Agnes Moorehead played Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Dwight Weist played Hitler, Peter Donald played Neville Chamberlain, and Edwin Jerome covered both Stalin and Haile Selassie. Furthermore, when Bryan returned from Germany in 1938 with 20,000 feet of fairly innocuous film, director John Glenn turned to the anti-Nazi German colony in Hoboken, New Jersey, who willingly constructed scenes of concentration camps, political prisoners, etc. Fielding tells us that Bryan was so upset that his footage was being used in an anti-Nazi film that he considered suing *March of Time* to secure an injunction against the film's release.

De Rochemont got away with impersonations and reconstructions because he was frequently right in his criticisms. An exception was when he drastically misunderstood Russia's economy in 1935. *Voice of Time*: 'Like her capitalist sister, the Soviet woman finds a lift to her morale in shopping. In well-stocked stores, today she can buy to her heart's content.' This was a rare case where the footage (again by Julien Bryan) dictated the commentary. Associate Producer Lothar Wolff put his finger on the unique strength of the series: 'Stylistically what makes the *March of Time* different from everything else is that in many instances the script dominated the picture, rather than the other way around... There is a documentary maxim that the picture should tell the story. I never subscribed to it. I think it's an over-simplification, just like *cinéma-vérité*.'

Fielding ably analyses the prac-

tical and theoretical implications of de Rochemont's editorial policy and his book is invaluable in describing working methods and production techniques. Yet his style and method seem to have weaknesses. Seeing the films, reading the paperwork and talking to the makers of the films does not necessarily enable one to tell the whole story. In an analysis of *March of Time* it is a serious omission not to have devoted a chapter to the effect the series had on its audiences, given that it broke all the rules of documentary journalism. No less serious than this omission is the pitfall inherent in aural history research methods. It is dangerous to trust the memories of people, let alone older people, without checking facts and then re-interviewing. Within the narrow space of my own knowledge about *March of Time*, I noticed several errors; there may be others which other people will notice.

Fielding credits Julien Bryan with the footage of anti-Jewish graffiti on shop windows which Fox had supplied five years before Bryan's visit to Germany. He confuses a crucial piece of film history in identifying the 1936 production *League of Nations Union* as the film which was banned in England and which Anstey showed to Churchill. The issue was in fact *Arms and the League*, which was made two years later. Fielding discusses the 10 million feet of film in the library without mentioning that *March of Time* does not own copyright on much of the footage in its own issues, let alone in its library. If you want to use a sequence from *Inside Nazi Germany*, then you may have to pay royalties to Universal, Fox, Pathé and Julien Bryan's son Sam. The legal and financial aspects of the acquisition of footage by de Rochemont would surely be both interesting and important. Finally, Fielding and the Oxford University Press could have helped their English readers by publishing at least a British issue list and preferably a concordance between the U.S. and British issues. Not only did they differ in title, issue date and text, but the

pictures were often amended for British audiences: the English print of *Inside Nazi Germany* omits the three shots of a man being prepared for execution. Not only does Fielding not mention this sort of variation in detail, but his book would have been an excellent opportunity to clear up the title and issues date confusion.

My conclusion therefore is that the book is very readable, excellently illustrated and pleasantly anecdotal. It gives a good picture of a colourful group of people and the films they made together. Unfortunately, as with some of the less successful issues of *March of Time* itself, I would willingly have sacrificed some of the pace and verve in favour of wider research.

JONATHAN LEWIS

FROM HOLLYWOOD WITH LOVE

By Bessie Love

ELM TREE BOOKS, £5.95

RITA HAYWORTH: The Time, the Place and the Woman

By John Kobal

W. H. ALLEN, £6.95

NED'S GIRL

By Bryan Forbes

ELM TREE BOOKS, £5.95

One could hardly think of three screen ladies who have less in common than the subjects of these autobiographies and biography: Bessie Love, the sweet, petite heroine of the silents, a Bride of Cana for Griffith in *Intolerance*, and still finding work in the 70s (*Sunday, Bloody Sunday, The Ritz*); Rita Hayworth, who set the screen on fire with her subtle erotic charge in the 40s and whose private life provided column after column for gossip writers; and the eccentrically regal Edith Evans, who varied the last half of her stage career with striking character parts in films, beginning with the phenomenally wizened *Queen of Spades* in 1948 (though as Forbes shows the true beginning of her film career was in 1915 and a Hepworth short called *A Welsh Singer*). To imagine them all swapping roles conjures up ludicrous images: Rita Hayworth as Lady Bracknell, Edith Evans as Gilda.

How do they measure up to book treatment? Taking as one's rule Chesterton's dictum (quoted by Forbes in the preliminary pages of *Ned's Girl*) that in a good biography the subject remains but the book doesn't, John Kobal's volume on Rita Hayworth leaves its volatile subject aloof and on her pedestal. This is hagiography rather than biography. Operating in the manner of an investigative reporter for a fan magazine, Kobal has tracked down her many co-stars, choreographers, directors and relatives for interview. The result is much useful information about the production of Hayworth's films, mixed up with decided marginalia (thirty Mexican beachboys were hired to scrape off barnacles from rocks used

in a location for *The Lady from Shanghai*!) and some unfortunate over-ripe prose. But the impulses and talent behind the image Hollywood fostered are harder to elucidate; the star herself offers only uncertain, partial reminiscences of her extraordinary career.

There is nothing uncertain about Edith Evans' taped reminiscences in the official biography by Bryan Forbes, her long-time friend and literary executor. The comments come precisely and idiosyncratically, and one easily hears her ringing tones piercing through the print, particularly when she dismisses Lady Macbeth ('Don't think much of her: she's not complete, I can't play people who are only half-finished') and Stanislavsky ('Crikey, I didn't know what he was getting at!'). But she still doesn't stand out boldly enough, for Forbes has decided to surround his beloved subject's long, distinguished, but essentially unspectacular career with the lumbering apparatus of a prestige biography. There are extensive quotes from other published sources, quotes from unpublished correspondence (some, from Shaw, are well worth having; others, between herself and her husband Guy, seem of limited value) and constant moralising comments from the biographer.

With the Bessie Love volume we reach a different scale, where small is beautiful. The book is the slimmest and most attractively produced of the trio, with the crispest, most valuable selection of photographs. The book's beautiful heroine can be seen doing everything from advertising a toy dinosaur 'Twistums' following her appearance in *The Lost World* to buying meat at a London butcher's in World War Two, ration book at the ready. And the text is equally crisp, with clear, fascinating memories of the practical aspects of being in the film business in the pioneer days—the difficulties of travelling to locations in costume or having a lunch break when the outside of one's cabin is being used as part of a set. This kind of detail no amount of research, however loving, can uncover; one has to have been through it all at first hand, and be able to place the memories within the perspective of cinema history. Bessie Love has done all of this, delightfully.

GEOFF BROWN

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DAVID BADDER is one of the editors of *Film Dope*... JAN DAWSON is writing a book on the new German cinema... CLYDE JEAVONS is Deputy Curator of the National Film Archive... ROBERT MACLEAN teaches film history at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario... E. RUBINSTEIN teaches at the College of Staten Island, New York, and is writing a book on Preston Sturges... SUE SUMMERS is a feature writer for *Screen International*... IAN WALKER lectures on Art History at Gwent College of Higher Education.

Letters

Paul or Acres?

SIR,—According to John Barnes (SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1977), Tjitte de Vries has revealed his ignorance of British patent practice. But is Mr. Barnes so familiar with it? Is he aware that the granting of a patent before 1905 had no practical value whatever, because the English patent office employed no examiners until this time? Does he know that a published list of all patent applications is available, and if so, why does he not mention in his book *all* the applications Robert Paul made in 1895 and 1896? Incidentally, if he will check the relevant specification, he will find that he is in error in saying (p. 26) that Acres was granted a patent in 1895. This is the date when he applied for one.

If indeed Birt Acres was the first in England to project successfully (and this is by no means certain when one takes account of the work of Le Prince) it is extraordinary that Mr. Barnes—although aware of the fact—does not mention anywhere in his book that Acres claimed August 1895, and not January 1896, as his earliest date for this achievement.

Mr. Barnes informs us that Paul possessed 'genius' and that Acres' attitude to films 'was rather that of the amateur' (p. 200). These simplifications are certainly suspect if tested against the information we have. In the matter of the first camera, for example, we are told by Talbot (although this information is omitted by Mr. Barnes) that before Paul had met Acres, he was 'quietly considering the feasibility' of converting a Kinetoscope into a projecting apparatus. Hardly the hallmark of genius! Yet Mr. Barnes declares that he is 'fully in accord' with Paul's claim that he both designed and built the first camera; it 'surely' belonged to him, he adds. But, even Paul agreed that he sold all this equipment to Acres and, regrettably, Mr. Barnes does not attempt to answer the central question—why, despite considerable commercial advantage, did Paul (if he was able) not construct another camera in 1895, after Acres had left?

Yours faithfully,

RICHARD BROWN

Bury, Lancashire.

SIR,—At the risk of extending an already long correspondence I feel I must add my voice to the Paul v. Acres debate.

John Barnes asserts that he has 'already shown' that Acres' film of the 1895 Boat Race was photo-

graphed not on an original machine of Acres but 'was indeed photographed with the Paul-Acres camera'. I remain unconvinced. Indeed the very existence of a 'Paul-Acres' camera is only supposition on Barnes' part.

The most simple explanation of the relationship between the two pioneers is that Paul, having made copies of the Edison Kinetoscope, had no supplier of films and so naturally turned to Acres, who was already working in the field and kept Paul supplied with films for both Kinetoscopes and projectors.

That Paul was not making films himself, even early in 1896, we know from one of the pieces of available evidence which Barnes omits from his 'authoritative history'. George Méliès recalled in 1913 (*The Bioscope*, March 27 1913) that when he was trying to buy a projector to start his own cinematograph show in the spring of 1896, he was approached by Paul who offered to sell him one. On going to London Méliès was disappointed to find Paul was not projecting films he had made himself but was relying on other suppliers. Méliès wanted not only to project films but also to make them and in this Paul was unable to help him. However Méliès did buy a projector from Paul and with it he began shows in his Robert Houdin Theatre. Realising that 'the mechanisms must be practically the same' for a camera as for a projector, he was soon making his own films.

We will probably never know with certainty just how the British film industry was born in the 1890s, and the continual discovery of fresh evidence must always modify our tentatively held views. To pass off supposition as fact as Barnes appears to be doing does a disservice both to his own researches and those of others working in the field.

Yours faithfully,

LUKE DIXON

London, N.3.

SIR,—The aim of my book, *The Beginnings of the Cinema in England*, was to present a comprehensive and unbiased account of the first crucial years of the cinema's history in this country. I was well aware that not all the facts could be recovered, but enough was known to reconstruct a reasonably accurate account of the events. Even so, I am continually seeking fresh information on the subject, and should any of your readers know of matter not already contained in my book, I will be very pleased to hear of it so that it can be included in the next volume of my history (now in course of preparation).

Unfortunately, neither Tjitte de Vries nor Richard Brown, in their letters to SIGHT AND SOUND, has enlarged our knowledge of the subject, so rather than give a tiresome point by point reply to the latter gentleman (I have already replied to the former) I prefer instead to make use of the space which you may kindly allow me,

to proffer this appeal. It is facts I am after, not polemic.

Mr. Dixon states that the existence of the 'Paul-Acres Camera' (by which I mean the camera designed in collaboration) is only a supposition on my part. How then is it that both Birt Acres and R. W. Paul can discuss such a camera in their correspondence of March and April 1896. (Incidentally, it is this camera which is illustrated on the dust jacket and on page 26 of my book.) Mr. Dixon also seems unaware that I make a point of stating that it was Birt Acres who operated this camera to supply Paul with films for the latter's Kinetoscopes and for the first model of his Theatrograph projector (pp. 29 and 95).

If Mr. Dixon had taken the trouble to read my book with more care, he would have realised that I also stated that it was not until April 1896 that Paul began to make his own films with a camera entirely of his own design (pp. 207 and 221). Why then does he take me to task for failing to mention a memoir of Georges Méliès published some 17 years after the event, and which merely confirms what I have already written?

Yours faithfully,

JOHN BARNES

Barnes Museum of
Cinematography,
St. Ives, Cornwall.

Group 3

SIR,—Richard Dyer MacCann's generally excellent article 'Subsidy for the Screen' (SIGHT AND SOUND,

Summer 1977) does rather continue the exaggerated impression that Group 3 films were 'suppressed by the exhibitors'. In fact, most received full circuit releases—usually as second features, but were they really strong enough (or long enough) for greater prominence? Interestingly, the two films deservedly most praised by Mr. MacCann, *The Brave Don't Cry* and *Conflict of Wings*, were released at the heads of double-feature programmes. The former (with a resounding slogan, 'See It and Be Proud') took precedence over a Don Siegel Western, *The Duel at Silver Creek*, on the Gaumont circuit.

Yours faithfully,

CLIVE DENTON

Toronto, Ontario.

Fisher's Ghost

SIR,—I am trying to locate any surviving (?) print of an old Australian silent movie film of 1924—the title of the film *Fisher's Ghost*, directed by Raymond Longford. I am a schoolteacher in Campbelltown and vice-president of the local historical society. The film is the story of Campbell town's famous ghost of last century, hence my search for a print.

Since the complete English rights of the film were secured for £500 in 1925, and the film was shown in London, a surviving print may be located in the U.K.

Yours faithfully,

JOHN R. GEALE

1 Georges River Road,
Campbelltown 2560,
N.S.W., Australia.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

UNITED ARTISTS for *The Last Wave*,
New York, New York.

20th CENTURY-FOX for *Julia*,
Chad Hanna, *Margie*.

CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *Sérial*,
Stroszek, *Nazarin*.

ARTIFICIAL EYE/GREENWICH FILM
PRODUCTION for *Cet obscur objet*
du désir.

ARTIFICIAL EYE/SUNCHILD
PRODUCTIONS for *Le Diable*,
probablement.

THE OTHER CINEMA for *Angel City*.
CINEGATE for *The American Friend*.

OPPIDAN/PROSPECTACLE-
FILMOBILIC-FR3 for *Dites-lui*
que je l'aime.

HEMDALE INTERNATIONAL for
Communism.

LAGOON ASSOCIATES for *Welcome*
to L.A.

ACADEMY/CONNOISSEUR for
Alphaville.

EUSTON FILMS for *The Sailor's*
Return.

MGM for *Madame Curie*, *The*
Asphalt Jungle.

COLUMBIA PICTURES for *The*
Reckless Moment.

PARAMOUNT PICTURES/NATIONAL
FILM ARCHIVE for *Sullivan's*
Travels.

SUNCHILD PRODUCTIONS/MOUNE
JAMET for *Merry-Go-Round*.

MERCHANT IVORY PRODUCTIONS
for *Roseland*.

CAMERA PRESS for photograph of
Ilie Nastase.

JON JOST for *Last Chants for a*
Slow Dance.

ZIPPORAH FILMS for *Canal Zone*.

CKK for *Assault on Precinct 13*.

MARC WANAMAKER/BISON ARCHIVES
for photographs of Balboa and
Fox Movietone Studios.

BBC-TV for *Spend, Spend, Spend*,
Where Adam Stood.

GRANADA TELEVISION for *Three*
Days in Szczecin.

MUNICH FILM MUSEUM for *M*,
The Loves of Pharaoh.

NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVE/THE SIR
MICHAEL AND LADY BALCON
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Sir Michael Balcon.

NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVE for *Duck*
Soup, *The Winning of Barbara*
Worth, *Downhill*, *Underground*,
Hollywood Revue of 1929,
photographs of Jacques Prévert,
Henry King. Stills from *Un Chien*
Andalou taken from the frame by
the NFA and the Education
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The Penguin Film Review

1946-1949

*Edited by Roger Manvell, R.K. Neilson Baxter,
and H.H. Wollenberg*

The Penguin Film Review will be an essential reference for the film library and the film enthusiast. Started at a time when film societies were making their initial hesitant start in peacetime, the *Review* was an immediate success. It fulfilled a need for information about what had been happening in the European cinema during 1939 and 1945 and provided in its large circulation a basis from which the work of film societies and subsequent film magazines – *Sequence* and *Sight and Sound* for instance – could take off.

The *Review* saw as its rightful concern any aspect of the cinema. It published articles by film-makers as well as critics; so that beside the writings of Siegfried Kracauer, Richard Winnington, Lotte Eisner, Jacques Brunius and others we find pieces by Anthony Asquith, Fritz Lang, David Lean and even Eisenstein.

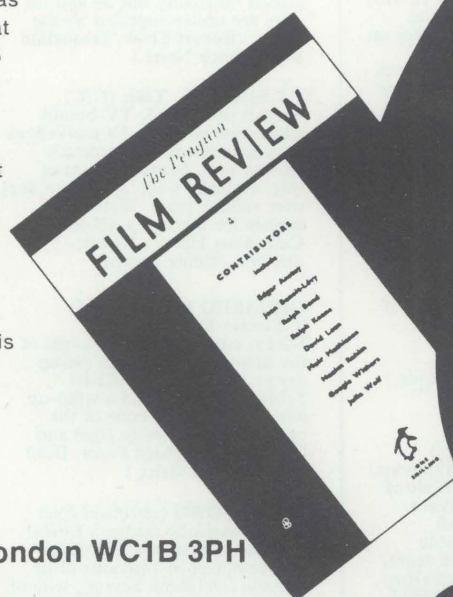
Since the ninth and last issue appeared in 1949 copies of the *Review* have become rare and complete sets difficult to obtain. This very welcome reprint is complete and contains an index and new introduction by Roger Manvell.

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Film Guide

****AUDREY ROSE** (*United Artists*) Superior hocus-pocus venture from Robert Wise, which relies on tricks of perception (mirrors, quirks of perspective) rather than *Exorcist* gore to convey the plight of reincarnated Audrey. Some unhappy bouts of spiritual pleading. (Anthony Hopkins, Marsha Mason, John Beck.)

****BIG BANANA FEET** (*Brent Walker*) A *cinéma-vérité* account of Billy Connolly's tour of Ireland in 1975 that makes a highly engaging introduction to this idiosyncratic Glaswegian comedian's source of inspiration in lavies, jobbies, swearing, soldiers and other unmentionables. (Directors, Murray Grigor, Patrick Higson.)

****BLACK JOY** (*Hemdale*) This vigorous British entertainment, directed and co-scripted by Anthony Simmons, focuses on the educative trials of an innocent Guyanese (Trevor Thomas) among the raffish denizens of Brixton. Notable mainly for its West Indian score, palpable good humour and sharp dialogue. (Norman Beaton, Paul Medford.)

***BLUE SUNSHINE** (*Columbia-Warner*) Ten years after taking the hallucinogen 'blue sunshine', some of Stanford University's flower children find the drug has the delayed effect of reducing them to hairless, homicidal maniacs. Another well-paced cod exercise from Jeff Lieberman, the director of *Squirm*. (Zalman King, Deborah Winters, Mark Goddard.)

***BOBBY DEERFIELD** (*Columbia-Warner*) High class soap opera which for a while promises more: writer Alvin Sargent makes neat work of his much repeated duel between neurotically introverted hero and neurotically extroverted (and romantically doomed) heroine. The drift into travelogue and TV-commercial posing goes unchecked by Sydney Pollack. (Al Pacino, Marthe Keller, Anny Duperey.)

***CHICAGO MATERNITY CENTER STORY, THE** (*The Other Cinema*) This blunt, well-documented piece of agitprop points the finger at the barons of the medical health industry for the 1974 closure of the Chicago Maternity Center, the city's only organisation offering efficient and inexpensive home-deliveries. (Directors, Jerry Blumenthal, Suzanne Davenport, Sharon Karp, Gordon Quinn, Jennifer Rohrer.)

****COMMUNION** (*Hemdale*) Irresistible Hitchcockian horror-thriller (and rather more than that in its subtle exploration of causes and effects), with a mysteriously masked maniac running amok with a knife amid the trappings of the Catholic church. (Linda Miller, Paula Sheppard; director, Alfred Sole.) *Reviewed.*

***DEAD OF NIGHT** (*Alpha*) Capable horror film which summons the spectre of the Vietnam war in the form of a

returning soldier who turns out to be one of the walking dead. Unexpectedly acute treatment of the politics of a middle-class, Midwestern family, with Lynn Carlin (from *Taking Off*) as a splendidly obsessive Mom. (John Marley, Richard Backus; director, Bob Clark.)

DEEP, THE (*Columbia-Warner*) A sequel to *Jaws* in name only, *The Deep* turns out to be an old-fashioned serial-type adventure, with an all-black cast of villains, some cleanly laundered sex, and a plot which deals in racy but banal terms with voodoo, drugs and sunken treasure. Peter Yates directs efficiently but he and his stars are under-supplied by the script. (Robert Shaw, Jacqueline Bisset, Nick Nolte.)

***DUELLISTS, THE** (*CIC*) Grossly simplified, TV-bound adaptation of Conrad's marvellous novella about two Napoleonic officers who, between bouts of war, absurdly wage a running duel over sixteen years. Watchable mainly for the fights. (Keith Carradine, Harvey Keitel; director, Ridley Scott.)

GREASED LIGHTNING (*Columbia-Warner*) Sticky, crowd-pleasing bio-pic of the first black champion racing driver. Credited to Michael Schultz who only did a wrap-up job, but revealing none of the excitement of *Cooley High* and *Car Wash*. (Richard Pryor, Beau Bridges, Pam Grier.)

****INDIA SONG** (*Artificial Eye*) This beautifully compact formal exercise laments the lost youth and compromised present of its heroine (Delphine Seyrig), wife of the French Ambassador in 1937 Calcutta. During an embassy reception, silent characters move in a somnambulist round, while disembodied voices—the ghosts of Marguerite Duras' India of the mind—discourse on past and present events. (Michael Lonsdale, Claude Mann, Mathieu Carrière.)

****INTRUDER, THE** (*Miracle*) Visconti's last film, based on a D'Annunzio novel, which exquisitely intertwines the contradictions of the pre-1914 Italian nobility with the tremulous hypocrisies of its hero. Scarcely puts a foot wrong, but scarcely ventures very far in its treatment of characters and setting. (Giancarlo Giannini, Laura Antonelli, Jennifer O'Neill.)

***JULIA** (*Fox*) A painstakingly elaborated version of the short account in Lillian Hellman's *Pentimento* of her relationship with friend and mentor Julia. Fred Zinnemann makes solid work of the anti-Nazi mission, but the treatment of the friendship is both teasingly insubstantial and over-reverential. (Jane Fonda, Vanessa Redgrave, Jason Robards, Maximilian Schell.) *Reviewed.*

****LACE-MAKER, THE** (*Contemporary*) Claude Goretta's calm and lovely variation on Bresson's *Une Femme Douce*, set partly in Proust's Cabourg, delicately probing into the multiple causes (you have to make up your own mind) behind the failure of a socially misallied romance. (Isabelle Huppert, Yves Beneyton.)

LAST REMAKE OF BEAU GESTE, THE (*CIC*) Less a parody of P.C. Wren's classic Foreign Legion adventure than an orgy of self-indulgence by Marty Feldman as both director and performer. Frenetically unfunny. (Ann-Margret, Michael York, Peter Ustinov.)

MAN WHO SKIED DOWN EVEREST, THE (*Pleasant Pastures*) Down 6,600 feet of the upper slopes, to be exact, captured here in an astonishing two-minute shot. The lead-up, though, disappointingly eschews investigation of its Japanese protagonist in favour of conventional travelogue. (Yuichiro Miura; directors, Isao Zeniya, Kenji Fukuhara.)

MARCH OR DIE (*Columbia-Warner*) Another of Lord Grade's white elephants: Foreign Legionnaire Gene Hackman reluctantly defends an archaeological excavation which allegedly contains enough treasure to wipe out France's financial losses in the First War. Dick Richards' formula direction does nothing to salvage the film's jokey, dated script. (Catherine Deneuve, Ian Holm, Terence Hill.)

***OH, GOD!** (*Columbia-Warner*) A wonderfully funny personal appearance by the Almighty in the person of George Burns, who—his comic timing brilliantly abetted by Carl Reiner's direction—almost makes one forget the coy fantasy customary in Hollywood's religion. (John Denver, Donald Pleasence.)

ONE SINGS, THE OTHER DOESN'T (*Cinegate*) Sentimental generalities bind together the strands of this meandering tale of the vicissitudes of two women (one a singer, the other the organiser of a family-planning clinic) on the road to self-fulfilment. Agnès Varda directs in the marshmallow style of *Le Bonheur*. (Valérie Mairesse, Thérèse Liotard.)

****PADRE PADRONE** (*Artificial Eye*) The Taviani brothers, Paolo and Vittorio, take up the cause of Sardinian shepherds, condemned from early childhood to a life of solitude and ignorance. Based on the autobiography of one such shepherd, Gavino Ledda, the film craftily distances and expands on its subject with theatrical and operatic techniques. A powerful tale of growth through knowledge. (Saverio Marconi.) *Reviewed.*

PELVIS (*Oppidan*) Memories of the famous rock 'n' roller are not conjured in this ramshackle tale of country boy who makes good in New York as pop star and drug addict. Despite racy lyrics, the mistimed jokes and shoddy direction result in complete confusion. (Luther 'Bud' Whaney, Mary Mitchell; director, R. T. Megginson.)

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN, A (*Contemporary*) With his second Joycean adaptation, Joseph Strick substitutes static realism for the Master's carefully composed account of Stephen Dedalus' intellectual development. Adopting an almost consciously disinterested tone, the film is notably lacking in the novel's commitment and passionate anger. Over-earnest performances abound. (Bosco Hogan, T. P. McKenna, John Gielgud.)

PUMPING IRON (*Cinegate*) This artful fictional documentary supposedly takes the lid off the physical-culture business but ends, in fact, as a none too subtle advertisement for the undeniably winning ways of retired muscle-man Arnold Schwarzenegger. (Directors, George Butler, Robert Fiore.)

****RABID** (*Alpha*) An effective s-f fantasy, on the lines of David Cronenberg's earlier *Parasite Murders*, with society beset by some rampaging medical nastiness. This one is less

remarkable for its gore and biological interests than for its tongue-in-cheek narrative: events and characters keep sliding off at tangents, and the hero is a helplessly spinning cog. (Marilyn Chambers, Frank Moore.)

***RACE FOR YOUR LIFE, CHARLIE BROWN** (*CIC*) Disappointingly under-developed narrative underlines Charles Schulz's continuing difficulty in adapting his 'human' strip-cartoon characters for the screen. The film is rescued by Rover, or in this case Snoopy and Woodstock, who are delightfully funny throughout. (Director, Bill Melendez.)

****SERAIL** (*Contemporary*) Further machinations from the dissembling house of fiction that made its debut in *Céline and Julie Go Boating*, this time pursued down more visually elegant and slyly unsettling paths by Rivette's scriptwriter Eduardo De Gregorio. The clash of cultures, identities and notions of reality makes for one of the more intriguing essays on cinema and narrative. (Bulle Ogier, Marie-France Pisier, Corin Redgrave, Leslie Caron.) *Reviewed.*

****STAR WARS** (*Fox*) Having proved he understood the aspirations of small-town, middle-American teenagers of the early 60s, George Lucas now offers a seamless transformation of the comic strips they had read a few years earlier. His space fantasy is a gleaming artefact composed of frequently exciting, but rarely arresting, new-minted effects. (Carrie Fisher, Mark Hamill, Alec Guinness.)

***TODAY IS FOREVER** (*Target*) Daryl Duke's up-dating of the lovers-with-a-year-to-live formula gets off to an affectingly laconic start but lurches into bathos when its middle-aged couple try to recapture their youth. Keenly edged performance by Peter Falk. (Jill Clayburgh, Dorothy Tristan.)

***VALENTINO** (*United Artists*) Rudolf Nureyev's considerable screen charisma never manages to redeem Ken Russell's lavish but surprisingly stodgy bio-pic. Lively wisecracks accompany the silent star's rise to fame, but the movie goes into decline well ahead of him. (Leslie Caron, Michelle Phillips, Felicity Kendal.)

VOYAGE OF THE DAMNED (*Rank*) Dull treatment of the true story of 937 Jewish refugees freed by the Germans in 1939; given an ocean liner, they find that nobody wants them. Lew Grade's stellar cast, an uncomfortable mixture of accents and acting styles, fails to invigorate laboured script and direction. (Faye Dunaway, Oskar Werner, Orson Welles; director, Stuart Rosenberg.)

WELCOME TO BLOOD CITY (*EMI*) Pretentious attempt to up-date the Western by crossing it with computer technology and a plot intent on making glib, pointless connections with contemporary realities. A talented cast fails to save the film from its programmed inanity. (Keir Dullea, Jack Palance, Samantha Eggar; director, Peter Sasdy.)

****WELCOME TO L.A.** (*Lagoon Associates*) Almost impossibly arch evocation of the 'city of the one night stands', somehow saved by the teasingly ambiguous performances of some of producer Robert Altman's stock company (under the spry direction of Altman associate Alan Rudolph) and moodily abstract photography of the city itself. (Keith Carradine, Sally Kellerman, Geraldine Chaplin, Harvey Keitel.) *Reviewed.*

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